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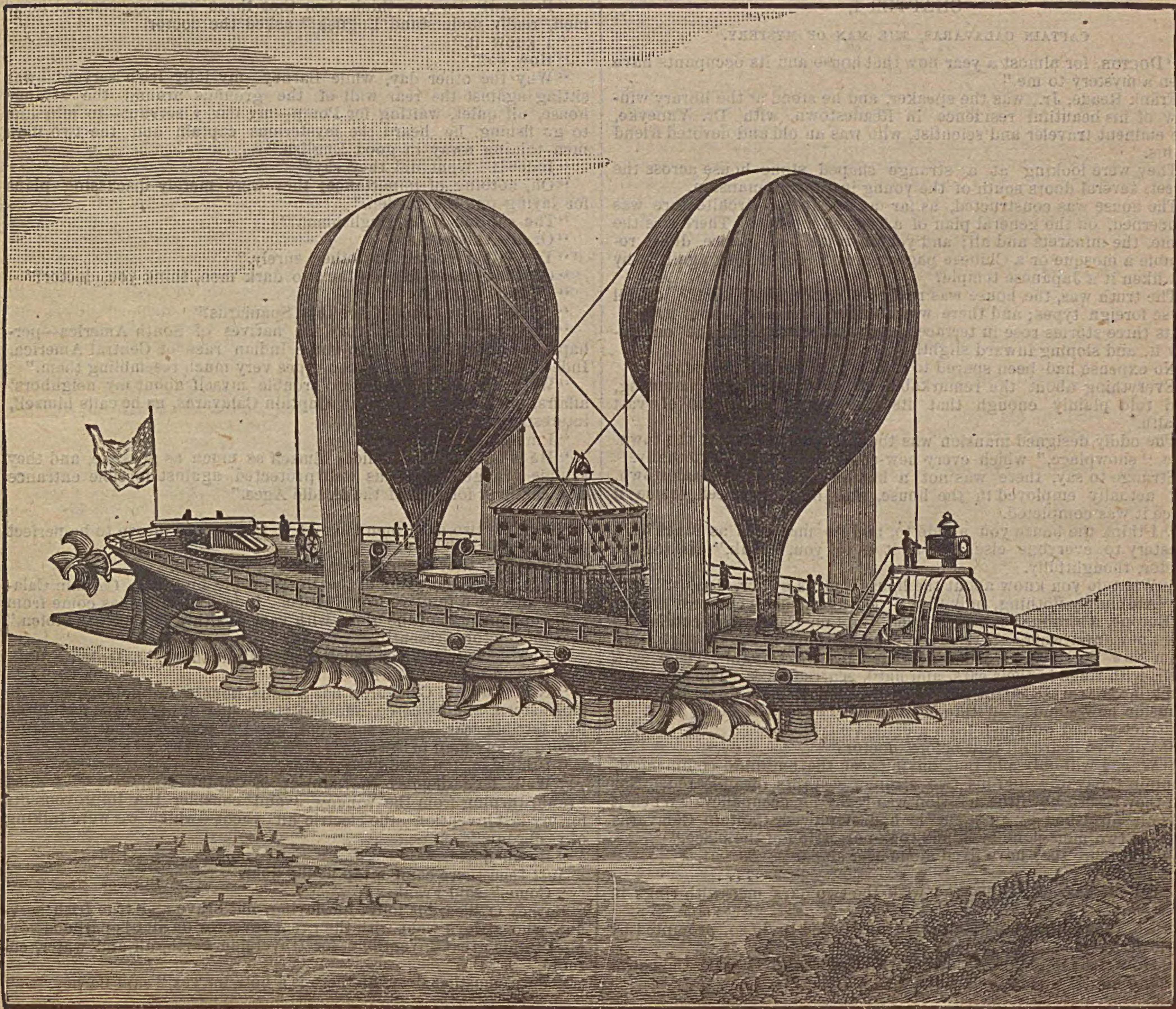
Vol. II.

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Frank Reade, Jr.,

AND HIS ELECTRIC AIR YACHT; OR, THE GREAT INVENTOR AMONG THE AZTECS.

By "NONAME."



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FRANK READE, JR.,

And His Electric Air Yacht:

OR,

The Great Inventor Among the Aztecs.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr., Exploring a River of Mystery," "Denver Dan, Jr., the Silver King," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN CALAVARAS, THE MAN OF MYSTERY.

"DOCTOR, for almost a year now that house and its occupants have been a mystery to me."

Frank Reade, Jr., was the speaker, and he stood at the library window of his beautiful residence in Readestown, with Dr. Vaneyke, the eminent traveler and scientist, who was an old and devoted friend of his.

They were looking at a strange shaped stone house across the street, several doors south of the young inventor's mansion.

The house was constructed, as far as its external architecture was concerned, on the general plan of a Turkish mosque. There was the dome, the minarets and all; and yet, at a second glance, did it resemble a mosque or a Chinese pagoda most? Or, to look again, why not liken it a Japanese temple?

The truth was, the house was really a remarkable jumble of all these foreign types; and there was another peculiarity about it.

Its three stories rose in terraces, each narrower than the one below it, and sloping inward slightly.

No expense had been spared to make the structure imposing.

Everything about the remarkable mansion was grand, imposing, and told plainly enough that its owner must be a man of vast wealth.

The oddly designed mansion was the talk and wonder of the town. The "showplace," which every new-comer went to see externally.

Strange to say, there was not a human creature in Readestown, not actually employed in the house, who had ever been inside it since it was completed.

"I think the house you allude to, and its master is as much of a mystery to everyone else here as it is to you, Frank," replied the doctor, thoughtfully.

"What do you know about the house and its owner, doctor?"

"Absolutely nothing, only that a year ago, when you were absent in Europe, a stranger calling himself Captain Calavaras—coming no one knew from where—arrived here one morning on the through train from New York. He was accompanied by two servants, large dark men, with rings in their ears, and hard, scarred faces. The same day Captain Calavaras bought the land where his strange, foreign-looking mansion now stands. Within a week the house was being built by contractors and workmen from a distant city."

"Yes, I've heard all that before, doctor."

"Well, I will only add that having seen the building commenced, Captain Calavaras and his two strange servants disappeared. Nor did they return until the mansion was ready for occupancy. When it was all furnished by an agent he had employed, Captain Calavaras and his two men came back and took possession of the place."

"And there they have lived alone ever since?"

"Yes."

"No one has ever conversed with the two dark men with rings in their ears?"

"No, though many persons have attempted to do so, prompted by curiosity."

"How strange, I know those dark retainers of Captain Calavaras pretend not to understand a word of English."

"Pretend! Do you think then that those swarthy, scarred-faced men, really understand English?" asked the doctor.

"I know it."

"How so?"

"Why the other day, while Barney—my jolly Irish servant—was sitting against the rear wall of the grounds around the strange house, all quiet, waiting for Pomp—my darky servant—to join him to go fishing, he heard the mysterious captain and the two dark men talking away in good English."

"Indeed! What did they say?"

"Oh, nothing of importance; they were merely discussing plans for laying out the garden."

"The captain is an Englishman?"

"Or an American."

"Yes, either one or the other, surely."

"Of what nationality are the two dark men, think you, doctor?"

"I hardly know."

"What do you think? Are they Spaniards?"

"Hardly. I've an idea they are natives of South America—perhaps, though, they belong to some Indian race of Central America. Indeed, in Yucatan I have seen types very much resembling them."

"Well, it is not my habit to trouble myself about my neighbors' affairs, but I confess this man Captain Calavaras, as he calls himself, interests me."

"I must say the same."

"He is a recluse. He hides himself as much as possible, and they say his strange house is as well protected against forcible entrance as a castle or fortress of the Middle Ages."

"True."

"And his two dark men look as if they would prove to be perfect tigers in a fight."

"Yes, and they seem to be his body-guard, too."

"I've heard that some of the townspeople hint that Captain Calavaras may be a fugitive from justice. Indeed, that he has come from some distant part of the globe with vast wealth which he has stolen," said the doctor, presently.

"I too have heard some such theories advanced," assented Frank.

"Do you believe them?"

"No. Captain Calavaras has a good, honest and noble face. He looks stern, almost fierce, and the right side of his face is disfigured by a terrible scar, as of a saber cut, but I'll wager he has as clean record as any man in town."

"I think so, too," said the doctor.

"Well, let's dismiss the subject of Captain Calavaras," replied Frank, turning from the window, "and consider the improvements for my last invention—the electric air yacht—which we were talking of yesterday."

"By all means."

Just then there came a tap at the door.

"Come," said Frank.

Barney O'Shea, his jolly, fun-loving, but brave and true Irish servant, who always went with the great inventor on all his perilous voyages in his great inventions for traversing earth, air and water, entered.

"Sure, masher dear, an' here is a note for yez," said Barney.

Frank received a large, square yellow envelope, sealed with a great red seal and stamped with a monogram of so intricate a pattern that Frank could make nothing of it.

He broke the seal and in a moment read the letter in the envelope. It ran as follows:

"FRANK READE, JR.:

"RESPECTED SIR,—Will you do me the honor to call upon me at my residence at nine o'clock this evening.

"Most respectfully yours, CALAVARAS."

Frank Read Jr. read the letter aloud.

"Here is a surprise," cried the doctor.

"Sure an' it's a miracle. Begob an' sorry's the wan man, in all the town, that has ever put the nose av him inside the door of Captain Calavaras' house, though many is the wan that's axed. Bad scran to the two dark-faced pirates that guard the place. And now it's me masher dear that has the free invitation to call at the strange house," said Barney.

"Who brought this letter?" asked Frank.

"Wan of the dark min, wid rings in his ears, like a heathen."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone."

"Then he did not want an answer."

"No; bedad he niver spoke a word. He saw me at the gate, an' the blackguard kim up and put the letter in me hand, an' wint on."

"Very well; you may go."

"Yis, sur; but it's wantin' to ax yez I am, if meself and Pomp, the nagur, can have a night off this avenin'?"

"What for?"

"Sure, an' there's to be a bit av a ruction—a prize fight for the nagur championship, down be the river, an' it's there we want to go."

"All right. But see you and Pomp don't come home full of fighting whisky," said Frank.

"Those two rascals, though at heart the best of friends and ready to risk their lives at any time in each other's defense, are always quarreling between themselves, playing practical jokes, and making mischief between themselves generally," he added.

"Well, I know that," said the doctor, smiling.

"But what in the world can the man of mystery want of you?"

"That is more than I can imagine. I am very curious to find out."

"Then you will call on him to-night?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I hope nothing evil will come of it, but somehow I've a premonition that Captain Calavaras is yet destined to exert a strange, fateful influence on your life. However, I will not advise you not to go to him."

"We have plenty of time before nine o'clock," added the doctor, as Frank remained silent. "Let's go out and look at your latest invention. You know I haven't seen it since the first of the week, and it was not then complete. We can talk of the improvements out in the workshop."

"All right, Doctor," Frank replied.

The workshop and laboratory in which all of Frank Reade, Jr.'s wonderful inventions were built, under his personal supervision, and from plans furnished by himself, was situated at the rear of the mansion, within the spacious ground surrounding it.

The Doctor and Frank Reade, Jr., passed out of the house, and as they were walking toward the workshop, they suddenly heard a jolly ducky voice.

"We has got you fus', Barney O'Shea,
Ar' under de box you am got to lay,
De Irish am good wid de shillalah stick,
But de nigger kin butt him mighty quick,"

sang the ducky.

"That's Pomp. Now there's trouble between him and Barney, I'm sure," said Frank.

"Lave me out av this, ye black blackguard av the world! Lave me out, nagur, or be the tail av Biddy Nolan's goat, it's breakin' the head av yez, I'll be after doin'!" roared the voice of Barney.

Turning the corner of the house, Frank and the doctor saw a most comical sight.

Pomp—as fat and jolly a ducky as one could find anywhere—was seated on the bottom of a large dry-goods box, beside him sat his wife, who was just about as fat a colored beauty as ever wore number ten brogans.

The couple were well-mated indeed.

They were grinning from ear to ear, showing an amount of ivory that almost would throw the elephant tusks of Ermin Pasha in the shade, and make the mouth of the festive African explorer water metaphorically.

"Yah, yah, yah!" laughed Mrs. Pomp.

"Yah, yah, yah!" echoed the lord and master of the colored beauty. But where was Barney.

"Whoop! Git off av the box or begob I'll bate the heads av yez! It's committin' highway arson ye are! Faith, an' I'm drowned for want av air, an' begob I haven't me black bottle wid me!" roared the voice of the Irishman.

It came from under the box.

Yes, Barney was there.

Pomp and his larger half had come along and found Barney dozing beside the box.

Pomp owed the Irishman one for playing a trick on him the day before.

So he and Mrs. P. had turned the big box over Barney and sat down on it.

Then the Irishman might just as well have tried to raise the wages of "the poor working man."

That box was turned over him to stay—until Pomp and the fairy formed lady of color seated thereon let him out.

Barney was mad all over, not because he suffered for air, for there were plenty of cracks in the box to admit it.

But to think "the nagurs" had got the best of an Irishman was what hurt him.

"We's jes' done kivered youse up, so dat you won't git wet when it rains," said Pomp facetiously.

"Dat's so, an' we'se was afeared dat de sun wuz done tan yere face, fo' de rain come," added Mrs. Pomp.

"Be the harp av Tara, is it tan ye say. Tan! Tan!" Be gorra an' it's tannin' the hide of ye nagurs I'll be after doin', wance yez let me out av the box," yelled Barney.

"Go, chille an' bet yer Sunday socks.

De Irishman stay under de box;"

chanted Pomp, tantalizingly.

"He am gwine ter stay dar all day long an' listen to de darkies song," sang Mrs. Pomp.

Barney kicked away at the box, and made a terrible racket.

The doctor and Frank stood around the corner of the house and roared. The situation was decidedly amusing, for everybody but Barney.

A moment, and Frank said:

"Look there, doctor. See who is coming from the work-shop, behind the darkies on the dry-goods box."

The doctor looked, and he saw Mrs. Barney O'Shea. Barney's wife was a strapping big Irish woman, with a pretty true Irish face, pink and white, with big blue-black eyes, like "a rale colleen av Killarney."

Mrs. Barney took in the whole situation.

And her sleeves were rolled up, there was fight in her eyes, and in her hand she held Barney's favorite shillalah. She crept up behind Pomp and Mrs. P., and then down came the shillalah.

"Whack, whack!"

CHAPTER II.

THE ELECTRIC AIR YACHT.

MRS. BARNEY hit Pomp and Mrs. P. on the heads.

They didn't know she was around until she made her presence felt in a striking manner.

The darkies didn't act as if they were glad to see Mrs. Barney.

The way they tumbled off the dry-goods box was a sight to see.

The next moment Barney turned the box over and sprang up with a real Irish "whoop."

"Now, begorrah, it's my turn, ye nagur! Be the shamrock so green say yer prayers! It's batin' the head av yez I am about til be doin'!" roared the irate Irishman.

"Give me the sprig av a stick, Biddy darlin'," he added.

Mrs. Barney handed over the shillalah.

Barney made a rush at Pomp.

Mrs. Barney flew at Mrs. Pomp.

The "ladies" seemed about to engage in a hair-pulling match.

"You're no lady," said Mrs. Pomp.

"It's the same ye are yoursel'!" retorted Mrs. Barney.

Pomp ducked his head.

There was only one way in which he could get the best of Barney in a fight, as experience had taught him, and that was by ducking and butting.

Pomp made a battering ram of his hard head whenever occasion demanded.

"Put on de air-brakes, Irish, fo' dar am a bustification 'twix de pile-driver I'se carry on dese shoulders an' dat bread-basket ob yours!" shouted Pomp.

A four-handed battle was about to be inaugurated, when Frank Reade thought it time to interfere.

"Come, come! I'll have none of this. Mrs. Barney and Mrs. Pomp, can it be that ladies of your social standing have so far forgotten the rules of "the four hundred," as to put up your hands? Ward McAllister would be shocked to hear of this. Barney, you and Pomp shake hands and get to work," said Frank, facetiously.

The ladies turned quickly in different directions.

They hurried to their cottages. Both had a wholesome respect for Frank Reade, and always obeyed him.

"Begob, an' the nagur may well be proud to grasp the hand av an honest Irishman, a gentleman from the County Clare, begob," said Barney.

"Yah, an' I'se one of de F. F. V's—"

"What's that, I dunno, nagur?" asked Barney, as he and Pomp shook hands.

"Fust Families of Virginny. Sho' youse aln't up on de pedegreen ob polite society, sah. Youse want to come down to a Thompson street ball to learn suffin' 'bout de gemman an' ladies ob de Souff."

"Be gorra, an' it's to a nagur ball yez dare invite wan av the O'Sheas. I'll—"

"That will do!" admonished Frank, so the Irishman turned off his talking power, and he and Pomp went into the workshop.

The doctor and Frank followed.

The shop was really a spacious building—one and one-half stories

high—and provided with all the most improved modern machinery of all sorts.

In the rear was the electrical department and the chemical room, or laboratory.

The center of the main room of the great building was now occupied by Frank Reade's latest and by long odds greatest invention.

He called it "The Electric Air Yacht."

And it seemed that the young inventor had certainly chosen a most appropriate name for this wonderful new machine for aerial navigation.

Just as Frank and the doctor entered the workshop a queer little dude in wide pants, little hat, eye-glass, and big cane came ambling in.

He had entered the front yard in time to see the inventor and the doctor go into the workshop.

"Aw! Ah, ba jove, don't-ye-know! Mistah Frank Reade, Jr., I presume! I am—awa—Mistah Felix Frolix, weporter of the Daily Trumpet," said the little dude.

And having delivered himself of this remark he put his big cane in his mouth, and stared at Frank and the wonderful electric air yacht, in mild surprise.

"Begorra, what is it?"

"Stick a pin in it."

"Is it alive I dunno?"

"Whar am de museum man dat owns it?"

These remarks were made by Pomp and Barney, aside.

"I am Frank Reade, sir. What can I do for you?" replied the inventor.

"Aw, ba jove, don't-ye-know, I thought to write up your new invention, don't-ye-know."

"Thanks," dryly.

"And if you will—awa—give me the points, don't-ye-know, I'll give you a column in the Daily Trumpet."

Frank laughed.

"All right, Mr. Felix Frolix, I'll tell you all about the electric air yacht—that the public is welcome to know," he said.

As he spoke he winked at the doctor.

The latter knew well enough Frank did not for a moment think of revealing certain secrets relating to his wonderful invention, which were known to no one save himself and the doctor.

"Thanks, awfully. Baw Jove, don't ye know, it's weally a surprising-looking affuib, I assuah you."

And Felix Frolix screwed his eye-glass in his weak little eye and looked at the electric air yacht in sincere wonder and admiration.

Frank was amused.

But he kept from laughing in the poor little dude's face.

And he went on to explain the main points about the electric air yacht, while the little dude got out his note-book and worked with his pencil the best he knew how, and asked questions.

"In the first place, the electric air yacht is about one hundred and thirty feet in length, as you can see," began Frank.

"Yes, ma deah fellow."

"The stern is square, the bow taper, like a racing yacht made to sail on the water."

"So I see."

"The deck is thirty feet wide at the central point, and a little narrower at the stern, while following the frame line it comes with it to a sharp point at the bow."

"Very sharp indeed."

"Yes. The depth of the vessel is less than that of an ordinary yacht, and yet the hold and space below the deck is sufficiently large to contain suitable cabins for myself and crew, a cook's galley and a storage place, or supply locker, a tank for water and a compartment for electric dynamos, driving engines and a complete chemical apparatus for generating gas in a most powerful condensed form.

"How wemarkable."

"The deck, you notice, is surrounded by a light railing. It is made of the hardest yet lightest material now known to the scientific world."

"What is that?"

"Paper."

"Oh, my!"

"Paper, reduced by hydraulic pressure to the hardness of steel. They are making car wheels of it now in Europe."

"Indeed?"

"The whole structure of the vessel is of paper, reduced to the strength of steel, as I have stated, save only some of the electrical machinery, which is made of a kind of elastic steel, and the two large balloons which are composed of the same material, rendered as flexible as rubber by a secret process, which I have perfected after years of study and experiment."

"You are really a remarkable man, my dear fellow."

Frank smiled as he continued:

"You will observe the twin balloons are suspended at points equally distant from the stern and the bows."

"Yes."

"The balloons are held up by the supporting power of an arch of the paper material passing over each great globe of condensed gas, and attached to the same at the center, while the two ends on the deck are riveted to the sides of the yacht."

"This arrangement does not, however, in the least interfere with the inflation of the great balloons or the drawing off of gas."

"The globes are still left free to expand and contract at all points

save the center of the top of the globe and a narrow space at each side.

"The balloons are covered with a heavy netting of rawhide, and cables of the same material are stretched between them, from the top of one to the base of the other, and vice versa."

"The supports sustaining the balloons are thus braced and strengthened, and the cables may prove of great value in high wind, where the surface of the balloons will offer a plane for great atmospheric pressure."

"True," assented the little dude.

"Now then, I will next describe the large cabin amidship, on the deck—which may properly be called the deck house."

"You see, it is a square structure with a sloping roof, and without windows—properly speaking—though it is perforated on all sides by round holes. The cabin is really a fortress on board the yacht. Those opening in the side are loop-holes."

"In the cabin there is an electric battery of twenty-four Winchester rifles. A man seated in the cabin can, by turning a crank, fire all twenty-four rifles at once, and sixteen times in succession. There are twelve guns set on each side of the cabin."

"The value of this cabin and battery of rifles worked by electricity, can scarcely be overestimated. Suppose, while anchored on the earth, the electric air yacht was attacked by foes, who surprised the crew and boarded the yacht. One man, rushing into the cabin on the deck, could rain death and destruction among the foe on the deck in every direction."

"Quite right, weally."

"In the bow there is a large brass cannon. And you see its mate in the stern. Both of these great guns are on platform carriages that revolve, so the cannons can be aimed in any desired direction."

"Exactly, my deah fellow."

"Above the caanon, forming the center of an arch of the wonderful material employed everywhere in the construction of the vessel, is an electric light of great brilliancy."

An alarm bell is hung on the roof of the deck-house. It can be rung by touching a button in the side of the house, electricity being its power."

There are six port holes in each side of the vessel, and a corresponding number of carbines. The port holes are the windows.

Now, as to the motive power, it is all electricity. The great twin balloons or globes merely supply suspensory power. They hold the yacht up in mid-air, but they do not propel it.

The balloons can be filled or the gas contained in them can be drawn off, as I will. The gas is generated on board the vessel. Tubes and stop-cocks connect the generator with the balloons. To raise the yacht I inflate the balloons.

To lower the vessel I draw off the gas.

There is a gasometer in the generating room, which tells me when the great globes of the twin balloons are inflated to their full capacity."

"Why do you have two balloons, my dear fellow? Why not have all your suspensory power in one?" asked Felix Frolix.

"Because in the case of a former invention of mine, called the Electric Air Monitor, I found out the danger of trusting to one balloon alone for my suspensory power, sir."

"Suppose, by any accident, the globe of a vessel's balloon of this character was to be ruptured. The vessel would fall."

"Now, by having two balloons I am always guarded against such a calamity, for either one of my balloons would alone keep the electric air yacht from falling if the other was ruptured."

"True, if one balloon bursted the yacht would sink, but it would not fall. I have so gauged the suspensory power of each balloon that one alone would cause the yacht to slowly sink to the earth. There would be no shock—no danger to the yacht."

"A great ideal!" exclaimed the little dude, admiringly.

"On each side of the vessel, placed at precisely equal distances, are four propellers."

"They are horizontal helices, and drive the vessel along when set in motion by means of my electrical engines."

"When a landing is made the fans are raised, by means of electric levers, so that they do not come in contact with the earth."

"There will be no jar in making a landing with the yacht, because under the hull are a set of steel springs of great flexibility and surpassing strength."

"Those springs, by yielding on the weight of the vessel, take off all shock, when a landing is made."

"Great speed can be attained by the yacht by turning on the powerful current of electricity from the dynamos which are my own private patent."

"They are made according to a secret formula."

"There seems to be a fine metal plate along the top of the rail," said the dude.

"Yes. I neglected to mention that. The metal plate is connected with the battery-room, a current of electricity can be made to run all around the deck along the rail."

"What is the purpose of that, my deah fellow?"

"Well, to give electric "treatment" free to enemies who may seek to get aboard the yacht without an invitation."

"Oh, you mean to shock them?"

"Yes. If they touch the metal plate along the rail."

"Ha! Ha! Weally, that is good, good, ba jove, don't-cher-know!"

"Now, my deah fellow, tell me about the supplies for the vessel, and what you mean to do with it and all that, don't-ye-know."

"My supplies will consist of arms, ammunition, prepared food sufficient for months, all sorts of scientific instruments, rubber boots, telescopes, barometers, and many things I have not now time to enumerate."

"Where do you mean to go in the yacht?"

"I don't know yet. I shall take a trip somewhere. Now as I have an engagement at nine I must ask you to excuse me," replied Frank.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY.

FRANK and the doctor turned to the door of the work-shop as the young inventor last spoke.

"My dear fellow, one moment," cried Felix Frolix, and the little dude came running after Frank and his old friend.

"Well, sir, what is it?" asked Frank, pausing.

"One little wish wilt thou grant me"—to quote the words of the old song—will you let me go with you to represent the Daily Trumpet?"

"Go with me—where?"

"Anywhere—on the electric air yacht."

"No."

"Please promise me you will let me go. I get twelve a week now, and if I could write up a great air voyage I'm sure the Daily Trumpet would raise my stipend to fifteen a week, and then, oh, then—bliss. Need I say more. I am in love, don't yer know, and when fifteen a week I draw the girl will be mine. Her mamma says so."

Felix Frolix was in dead earnest, but Frank and the doctor fairly roared, until the tears came into their eyes.

The little dude sucked his cane and looked surprised and hurt.

"I beg your pardon," Frank hastened to say. "And as I am always anxious to do the proper thing and help all true lovers on the way to happiness I will take back my no and in place of it say yes. You can go with me on the first trip of the Electric Air Yacht."

"Bravo! Bravissimo! Gladys Maud Laura Jean Smith those art mine, mine!" cried the delighted little dude.

The inventor and the doctor enjoyed the scene hugely, and Barney and Pomp, in the work house door, threatened to laugh their heads off.

The little dude thanked Frank a dozen times, promised to call his first son Frank Reade, Jr., and went off to tell his best girl that the time she would be his was surely coming now.

The doctor said, when he and Frank stood alone in front of the Reade mansion a little later:

"My boy, we didn't discuss the improvement for the electric air yacht, after all."

"No. Come over to-morrow morning, and we will do so, and then I'll tell you all about my visit to the man of mystery, Captain Calavaras, at his remarkable mansion."

"Very well, Frank, I'll come."

"Good night, doctor. Now I'm off for the residence of Calavaras."

"Good night, Frank, and good luck."

Frank walked off, under the moonlight.

The doctor turned toward his own house.

Glancing back Frank saw Pomp and Barney going down the street, toward the river. They had started off for the scene of the colored prize fight.

Frank kept wondering what Captain Calavaras could want with him.

His curiosity was fully aroused. He hoped he might learn something of the strange man's life.

Arriving at the iron gate of a high wall, in front of the residence of Capatin Calavaras, what was Frank Reade's surprise to find the gate ajar.

He knew this was an unheard of thing.

Always, day as well as night, that gate had heretofore been kept jealously locked.

What could it mean?

Frank wondered and began to think the night might have some real adventures in store for him.

He entered the gate.

The yard beyond was spacious.

Along a path Frank advanced to the front door of the mansion.

It was a massive door of oak, covered with great iron-headed spikes.

Certainly it looked more like the portals of some feudal castle than the front door of a modern residence.

Again Frank was surprised—astonished.

He found the massive door partially open.

Still Frank had neither seen or heard anybody in or about the strange mansion.

A gust of wind carried the door wide open as Frank stood before it.

He saw a spacious hall, covered with tiger skins. The hall-rack was a grotesque tree trunk, with the tusks of elephants for its arms. A magnificent mirror at the top was held in place by buffalo horns, polished and mounted with gold and silver.

A soft gas lantern of tinted glass in a frame of burnished gold suspended from the lofty ceiling lighted the hall.

The hall was covered with lincrusta walton in exquisite designs, and against one side was a group of strange weapons, spears, arrows, battle-axes, war clubs, shields and two great two edged swords, with edges like a great saw, and handles covered with the hide of some animal.

Frank stood for a moment in the center of the hall. Then he began to advance toward a door at the further end of it.

But just then a most startling and alarming thing transpired.

The light in the strangely decorated hall was mysteriously extinguished.

Then Frank Reade heard the door at the end of the hall dashed open.

There came a rush of a number of footsteps, and the succeeding moment the young inventor found himself set upon by three men.

He could not see them, it was true.

But the tones of three voices, harsh, strange, using a language he had never heard before, and of which he could not understand a word, reached him.

"Merciful Heaven! Have I been decoyed here to be murdered?" thought Frank.

He was unarmed.

But he made a desperate fight.

He thought he was battling for his life. His struggles were unavailing.

He was borne down.

"Help! help!" he cried.

Then his voice was silenced. A powerful hand clutched his throat. A terrible weight was upon his chest, for a strangler knelt there.

Frank felt his brain reel.

He could not breathe; he thought his last hour had come. But all at once there came a flash of brilliant light in the hall.

In the door through which Frank's three assailants had come appeared Captain Calavaras.

He was lividly pale. The blood trickled from a wound in his temple. In his right hand he leveled a revolver.

Bang! bang!

Two shots rang out.

Then came a shot from without the house.

Frank's assailant sprang away from him, and with his two companions ran from the house.

The shots fired by Captain Calavaras had not hit either of the three men.

But they had fled in alarm.

Frank caught a glimpse of them as they went.

They were swarthy fellows, and clad in Mexican costume. But they were out of the house so quickly Frank could scarcely tell what their faces were like.

The inventor staggered up.

The owner of the strange house grasped his hand and said anxiously:

"Mr. Reade, I trust you are not seriously injured?"

"No, sir."

"Good! I should never have forgiven myself if you had been slain or badly hurt."

"You saved my life, Captain Calavaras. The villain who had me down meant to strangle me. I owe you a debt of gratitude."

"Say not so. On the contrary, I am the one to apologize. You were attacked in my house, to which you have come at my request. It was my duty to protect you. I should have done so at the cost of my own life, even, if needful."

"You are wounded," said Frank.

"Only a scratch. Your coming alarmed the assassins. They had knocked me down. It may be they thought me dead."

"Who were they?" asked Frank.

Captain Calavaras looked at Frank strangely for a moment.

He did not directly reply.

"Come into the library. But—who comes? Ah, it is my good Tamos and Mora."

Just then Captain Calavaras' "two dark men, with rings in their ears," as the townspeople described them, came in.

In a strange language Captain Calavaras and the two men spoke.

Then the latter hurried away.

"I have sent them on the trail of the assassins," said Captain Calavaras.

Then he stepped to the door.

Frank saw him draw the bolt and turn the key.

Then he turned to the young inventor and said:

"Assuredly, Mr. Reade, you will do me the justice of believing that I had not the slightest thought you would meet with peril under my roof when I invited you to call here to-night."

"Certainly I believe that, sir," Frank rejoined.

Captain Calavaras opened the door at the end of the hall, which he had closed after rushing to Frank's rescue.

The young inventor followed his strange host and immediately found himself in a magnificently appointed apartment, whose four walls were almost covered with books.

The chairs were made of bamboo, cushioned with the hides of strange animals. The floor was covered with a matting of fine reeds, beautifully stained. There was an air of barbaric splendor about the room that impressed Frank.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRANGE HISTORY OF CAPTAIN CALAVARAS.

In the center of the apartment was a table of carved wood, beautifully inlaid with ivory and pearls.

But the one object which particularly attracted and retained the attention of Frank Reade, Jr., has not been mentioned.

It was a remarkable metal formation of a reddish yellow cast, shaped like a pyramid, standing four feet high in a corner.

In relief, the structure was covered with carved figures of men and animals.

Frank saw the men depicted on the metal pyramid were all tall, erect, and that they wore plumed head-dresses, and a sort of armor about the body.

But those figures did not in the least resemble the North American Indians.

There was a door in the metal case, and its hinges could plainly be seen.

"Be seated," said Captain Calavaras, indicating an easy chair beside the center table.

Frank accepted the seat, and Captain Calavaras sat down opposite him.

With a fine silk handkerchief he bound up the scalp wound on his head, and Frank said:

"Will you now kindly make known to me to what I am indebted for the honor of your invitation to visit you?"

"Yes, sir, my motive in seeking an interview with you here was originally one which may be stated in a few words. I knew you were an expert electrician—one of the most celebrated our country has ever produced."

Frank made a deprecatory gesture, but Captain Calavaras went on:

"To be brief. I wished to show you over my house, and point out to you where I wished to have certain electrical appliances to guard against the entrance of burglars placed. Those appliances I hoped to be able to make a contract for with you, and engage you, personally, to set them up."

"You speak in the past tense, captain, as if indeed you had now changed your mind about the original purpose for which you invited me here," remarked Frank when his strange host paused.

"You are right. My purpose has undergone a change within the last half hour, sir. Occurrences have taken place which at a single stroke, as we may say, have vitally changed the whole plan of my future life."

"Can it be? Then my services are no longer required?" observed the young inventor.

"I did not say that," replied Captain Calavaras, and suddenly rising, he strode up and down the room, while Frank was aware that he was scrutinizing his face the while.

It seemed to the inventor that his strange host was seeking to estimate his character—to weigh his worth before committing himself further.

Captain Calavaras suddenly paused and became seated, and seemed for a moment or so oblivious of the presence of his guest, buried in thought.

Looking at him Frank noted what a splendid-looking man he was.

He possessed a powerful face, clear-cut features, large dark eyes, black hair and beard, and his form was grand, never were seen wider shoulders or a deeper chest, and he was more than six feet tall.

"Have a weed, Mr. Reade," at length said the remarkable man, pushing a box of fine cigars toward Frank, while the great scar on the right side of his face seemed to glow ruddily in the gaslight. "We may as well smoke, for I have resolved to talk with you at some length," he continued.

And when the cigars were burning he went on:

"I have heard that you have just completed a most wonderful electrical aerial vessel. Am I correctly informed?"

"You are," replied Frank, wondering mightily what was coming next.

"Very good. Within the last ten minutes I have resolved to make you the following direct business proposition: I will pay you the sum of one hundred thousand dollars in gold for the use of your electric aerial vessel for six months, you to navigate it for me with your own crew, and sail where I may direct, you to be captain and control everything and everybody on the vessel, save only that you receive your directions from me and make the vessel serve my purpose."

Frank was quite astonished.

He looked at Captain Calavaras keenly. Surely he was in earnest, evidently he was perfectly sane.

Frank was about to speak.

But the other restrained him with a wave of his hand, and continued:

"Hear me out. In order to convince you that I am able to pay you the sum I have stipulated, I propose to pay you fifty thousand dollars here and now, if you accept my proposal."

As he spoke Captain Calavaras arose, crossed the room to the metal receptacle, shaped like a pyramid, and opened its door by means of a concealed spring. Frank saw a heap of buckskin money bags, each marked thus:

"\$10,000. Gold."

Five of those bags Captain Calavaras brought to the table. Meanwhile Frank had not spoken.

"Before you give me your decision I am in honor bound to state to you that the expedition upon which I wish you to go with me in your aerial vessel will be one of great peril; in fact, no doubt the most dangerous voyage mortal man ever set out upon."

"One question, sir. Regarding the danger I make no inquiry; I do not count it. But tell me this—is there aught to be accomplished in this voyage which a man of honor should refuse to undertake?" said Frank, somewhat sternly.

"No, sir. I pledge you my honor as a gentleman, sir, there is not."

Frank Reade calmly knocked the ashes from his cigar and said, in his quick, determined way:

"Then, sir, it's a bargain. The Electric Yacht is yours for six months, and I and my crew will sail it where you will."

Captain Calavaras looked surprised at this wonderful young man who accepted a proposition full of unknown dangers, without further questioning.

"Good. You are a man after my own heart," he said, heartily, and he and Frank shook hands across the table.

"That binds the bargain. The fifty thousand dollars now before you is yours," said Calavaras.

"And now," he added, "since the bargain is made, and I see you have a stout heart as well as a great brain, I owe it to you to tell you where I mean you shall take me in your aerial vessel."

"If you like I shall be pleased to hear."

Again Captain Calavaras arose and crossed to the metal pyramid. From an inner compartment of the unique treasure casket he drew forth a folded parchment, came back to the table and placed it unfolded before Frank.

The latter looked at it keenly and saw only a meaningless series of signs and symbols.

"I make nothing of it," he said.

"That is a will," replied Calavaras.

"A will! Surely, no civilized man ever made such a will."

"No, that will was made by an uncivilized king, far away in a distant land, where only myself and one other white man ever set foot."

"Your story is wonderful."

"But strictly true. Listen, that parchment is the last will of an Aztec ruler—the race of ancient Mexico is supposed to be extinct; but it is not. In Central America, dwelling in a secret place, well hidden by natural formation, there has dwelt a remnant of the Aztec race, ever since the Spaniards conquered Mexico. The last of the ancient people now number about three thousand souls. Years ago, I was shipwrecked on the coast of Central America, with one other white man, a scoundrel—a fugitive from justice, and my bitter enemy. We separated and wandered inland, seeking some human habitation. Want and exposure for a time unsettled my mind. When I came to my reason I found myself in a beautiful land—the home of the last of the Aztecs.

Later I saved the old king's life, when a crafty soldier of his race sought to create a rebellion, and put the old king to death, that he might take his crown. The king was grateful, and he then made the will you now see before you, appointing me to reign as king after his death; for such is the law of the Aztecs. Each ruler appoints his own successor, and can choose whom he will.

The king had a son—a mere lad of ten years—a beautiful noble boy—and he would have named him for the next king, only he feared his enemies would in that event put him to death.

"The old king died suddenly after he made the will. His people accepted me as king. I took the position in order to guard the little prince, to whom I had become much attached. Soon the evil warrior who had sought to overthrow the old king caused a rebellion, but I put down the rebels and supposed the chief plotter was slain in battle. After that all went well for a long time, save that the white man—my deadly foe—who had been shipwrecked with me, found his way to the hidden country of the Aztecs. I saved his life. He lived among my people. He asked my pardon for the past. I forgave him, for he seemed truly penitent. Finally a great longing came upon me to return to my country. I then appointed the little prince—then fifteen—king, and made the chief officers of the realm pledge themselves to him. The little king made me a present of a million in gold, had me guided to the neighborhood of a Mexican town, and, accompanied by two devoted Aztecs, I came to the United States with my gold."

CHAPTER V.

CAPTAIN CALAVARAS' STORY CONCLUDED—DOWN BY THE RIVER.

CAPTAIN CALAVARAS paused.

Having lighted a fresh cigar he continued:

"The two dark men, who have been my servants here, called Tamos and Mora, are the Aztecs who came with me from the hidden country. They are my guardsmen.

"Before the old Aztec king died he placed in my keeping the great secret of his race, to be held in trust by me for his son, until the latter was twenty one. Then I was to surrender the secret to him. That they might carry back the secret to the young prince, when the time came, I permitted the devoted Aztecs to come to America with me, for I brought the king's secret with me here, and it is now in yonder strange safe—shaped like a pyramid, which was made by the Aztecs.

For five years I have been a hunted man. For five years the man who was shipwrecked with me, has hunted me, aided by his Mexican cut-throats, seeking to murder me and steal the king's secret. The white villain found out among the Aztecs that the secret the old king had given me told where a great treasure in gold—valued at a hundred million or more probably, if computed in our money, was hidden.

"He escaped from the Aztecs with stolen gold enough to make him rich for life. But he vowed to kill me, and secure the king's treasure.

"To that end he took the two men you were assaulted by here to-night into his confidence.

"They came here this night, during the absence of my men, opened the doors, like skilled burglars, and surprised me.

"They would have murdered and robbed me, but they were alarmed by your coming.

"Now you can understand why I have made the house like a fortress. Why we have let no one enter. I sought to guard my life and the secret the old king had given me in trust.

"To-night, when the Mexican assassins went to attack you I picked up a slip of Aztec parchment one of them dropped.

"Almost at a glance I read the picture writing on it, and so learned that the plotting warriors who sought to kill first the old king and then me and seize the Aztec kingdom is not dead, as I supposed. He was not killed. On the contrary he was made a captive by a hostile tribe. He has recently escaped to the Aztecs and organized a rebellion, imprisoned the young king and threatens to put him to death.

"Now, then, in conclusion, let me say that in your electric air yacht I propose to return among the Aztecs to right the wrongs done by the conspirator, release the young king, and, if possible, place his authority on a secure footing and see that the great treasure is not found by foes?"

There was a long silence when Captain Calavaras had concluded his wonderful story.

Frank was thrilled and interested.

"Are you still willing to go with me among the Aztecs, now that you know all?" finally asked the captain.

"Quite so. In fact, captain, I am now as fully determined to go as you are, I am deeply interested in the noble mission you have to accomplish."

Just then there came a ring at the bell.

Then a peculiar rap and a signal call.

"My guardsmen," said Captain Calavaras.

He went to the hall.

Presently he came back to the library.

Frank expected to see only his two faithful retainers following him.

But he was greatly surprised when he saw that besides the two dark men Pomp and Barney entered the library.

"You here, my men! How comes this?" cried Frank.

He was destined to learn that the night had brought with it a coincidence of adventures—that Pomp and Barney had passed through almost as thrilling experiences as himself since they left his house.

We saw Pomp and Barney set out to attend the prize fight for the colored championship when Frank Reade, Jr., started for the residence of Captain Calavaras.

The fight was to take place in a field south of the town, near the river.

As Pomp and Barney hastened along they were chaffing each other as usual.

"Begob, an' it's not much av a ruction the two nagur prize-fighters will be afther showing us, it's thinkin' I am," said Barney.

"Dar's whar you is off yer base, Irish. Dem yere two colored gemmen am de be boss sluggers. I done tole yer, Irish."

"Faith, an' a nagur can't foight."

"De colored folks am a heap better on de fight dan de Irish."

"Yer a liar!"

"Doan' talk out loud like dat, sah!"

"Begob, an' the nagur is tryin' to pick a ruction wid an Irish gentleman."

"No, sah. But doan' yer fool wid dis chile. Dat's all. You hear me whisper, man?"

"Be the shamrock av the ould sod, do yez think it's afraid av a nagur I am?"

"Doan no 'bout dat, sah," said Pomp.

"Doan call dis chile names, man," he added.

"Begorra, an' it's a quiet, peaceful man I am. Long life til the loikes av me. But, begorra, whin a nagur dares me til foight, sure an' it's more thin a County Clare gossoon kin stan'. Peel yerself, nagur," cried Barney.

Just then they came into the field by the river.

There a regulation twenty-four foot ring had already been set up.

A mob of colored sports and a few white toughs were on hand.

Barney and Pomp came into the crowd still quarreling.

The Irishman was spolling for a ruction, and doing his best to pick a fight with Pomp.

"Fight it out! De champions has not yet showed up fo' de great battle. Befo' da' come, as master ob ceremonies on dis suspicious 'casion, I done offer youse two gemmen de use ob de ring to settle de little diffikilty 'tween youse in," said a big buck negro.

"Whoop! Is it dramin' I am? Faith, an' me heart is brimmin' wid joy! Sure, an this is a bit av Donnybrook brought over til America. Come on, nagur—come on!" yelled Barney.

He threw off his coat, jumped over the ropes into the ring, and began dancing about, sparring the air, and continued:

"A ruction at last! Whoop! Ireland forever! Come on, ye nagur! Come on, ye woolly coon, an' it's an Irish gentleman from the County Clare will bate the head av yez."

"Dis eitzen didn't come yer fo' to fight. He done come fo' to look on. He am a mere specketater, tha's all," said Pomp.

Then the negroes began to jeer Pomp.

They were naturally on his side, and they wanted to see him whip the Irishman.

"Shut up, youse low-down colored trash, fo' I done got mad an pull a razor. If I muss, I muss, so y're goes fo' de battle," cried Pomp, at last.

Then he jumped into the ring.

"Whoop! Begob an' it's knockin' av the nagur out in de fust round I'll be afther doin'!" cried Barney.

"Hole on dar, Irish. You're gittin' ahead ob yerself, sah," retorted Pomp.

Then Barney came at him.

The crowd yelled in delight.

The darky and the Irishman went at it hammer and tongs.

"Whoop! Whoop!" yelled Barney as he got in a hot left-hander on Pomp's nose that drove him half way across the ring.

"Come an' see me, nagur! Come again. Whoop, I'm the Irish champion!" shouted Barney.

But Pomp was getting down to business.

He began to duck; Barney knew he was getting ready to butt.

Barney could always get the best of the darkey in a stand-up fist fight.

But when the latter took to butting him with his hard head, the Irishman knew he was bound to get the worst of it.

Barney dodged about and became wary.

The darkey mob saw Pomp's game and cheered him.

Suddenly he saw his chance.

Then he shot at Barney. Head first he went and telescoped the Irishman below the belt.

Barney went down as if he had been hit by a pile-driver.

He seemed to be knocked out. Just then there came the alarm yell of:

"De cops! De cops!"

Then the way the crowd scattered was a sight to witness.

They fled pell-mell in every direction, and a dozen men of the town police, who had got wind of the proposed prize fight, came charging for the ring.

Pomp ran.

But the police collared Barney as he got on his feet.

"Pomp! Pomp! me jewel! Will yez go back on yer old friend, now?" yelled Barney.

"No, sah! De colored cyclone ain't dat kind ob a coon!" shouted Pomp.

He and Barney always stood by each other against outsiders, being devoted to each other at heart.

The next moment the darky came charging into the police, butting right and left. He upset four or five officers in a trice. Then Barney was free, and away he and Pomp ran, at full speed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT AT THE CABIN.

SEVERAL of the police officers, very much enraged, pursued Barney and Pomp.

But they ran into a strip of woods.

Dodging about in the cover, they sought to elude the officers.

Presently they came to a deserted fisherman's cabin.

There they resolved to hide.

They entered the cabin. All was gloom inside the old building.

It was provided with but one window, and though it was now moonlight outside, very little light entered through the one window.

Barney and Pomp heard the police officers crashing through a thicket near by.

They went past the cabin without seeing it.

Soon the noise they made died away in the distance.

"Golliel I done reckon we hab gibben dem ossifers de slip suab," said Pomp, then.

"Begorra, it's right ye are, I'm thinking," Barney assented.

"Spec's we better mosey home," Pomp presently remarked.

"Come along thin, nigger."

Barney started for the door.

"Hole on, Irish! What am dat?"

Pomp grasped Barney by the arm.

"What is what, sure?" the latter asked.

"Listen, Irish!"

They were silent for a moment, and both listened.

"Footsteps, begorra!" whispered Barney, at length.

"Dat's so."

"Faith, an' some one is comin'!"

"You'se said it. Dar am sebbberal men comin'."

"Yes, an' be the shamrock, they are comin' for this cabin."

Barney looked through the window, and added:

"Three min they are, that's comin'!"

"Do ye know dem, Irish? Am da cops?"

"No."

"Who den?"

"Begorra 'an I never seed the likes of thim."

"Let's hide."

"Where?"

"In dat closet."

Pomp pointed to an interior door.

"Come along wid ye, nagur!" cried Barney.

He leaped into the closet, the door of which Pomp had indicated.

Pomp followed.

The closet was a small one, but plenty large enough to hold them both, and with room to spare.

Pomp closed the door.

The succeeding moment the three men Barney had discovered sprang into the outer room.

One said in English:

"Here we will make a stand. Captain Calavaras' two men who are chasing us will come in here to look for us."

"Yes," said another of the strange trio, "and they are but two."

We will be ready with our daggers and fall upon them and slay them when they come in."

"Good," said the third man. "Then the way to the secret hidden in Calavaras' pyramid safe will be clear, save for Calavaras himself."

"Certainly," replied the first speaker, "for we have only Captain Calavaras left to guard the pyramid safe. I think Frank Reade, the Americano, will get out of Calavaras' house and run for home as soon as he can, after the choking we gave him."

"Bravo! We will make way with Calavaras' two guards here, and then go back to finish Calavaras and get into the safe," said another.

Barney and Pomp heard all.

"The blackguards av the worruld. Sure an' we'll spoil their game, an' bate the heads av thim, for they must have hurt our dear masther Frank, bad luck till the spalpeens," said Barney.

"Dat's de talk. We'll gib dem rascals a surprise, Irish."

"A surprise in the rear, begorra."

"An' help Captain Calavaras' men."

"Faith, an' we will."

Barney found a broken oaken chair in the closet, and picked up one of the rounds.

"Sure, an' it's a sprig av a shillelah I have in the fist av me now. It's a Donnybrookattoo I'll be afther batin' on the heads av the rascals."

"Whist!" he added.

That moment more men reached the outer door.

Barney pushed open the closet door a little way.

Looking out he dimly saw the three rascals, who had sought to rob and murder Captain Calavaras.

The outer door opened. In came Captain Calavaras' men, whom he had sent in pursuit of the assassins from his house.

The three scoundrels were about to charge upon the guardsman of Captain Calavaras, with daggers drawn.

Suddenly Barney uttered a yell.

Pomp echoed his shout.

The assassins halted in surprise.

The ensuing instant Barney and Pomp were on them in the rear.

"Whack! whack!" Barney's shillelah fell on two heads.

Pomp telescoped the third assassin with his head, and he fell.

And the Irishman shouted.

"We are frrends av Captain Calavaras, and Frank Reade's servants be gobi!"

The guardsmen of Captain Calavaras sent up a glad shout.

But at that instant the two men Barney had hit seized the one Pomp had "telescoped," and dragging him along, charged through the door with a tremendous rush, sweeping Captain Calavaras' men out of their way.

Into the woods they rushed.

Barney, Pomp and the two dark men promptly started to pursue them.

But as they made for the cover which the assassins had reached, they were halted.

A volley of pistol shots were discharged at them from the woods.

The bullets sang about their heads, but fortunately none of them were hit.

But a pistol ball crashed through Barney's hat.

He leaped back into the cabin. Pomp and the two dark men followed.

They knew it would be death to advance upon the concealed men just then.

"Sure an' they have the advantage now," said Barney.

He and his comrades waited a few moments.

But no more shots were fired from the woods.

At length Barney and the others slipped out of the cabin.

Then they crept around behind it, and finally entered the woods at a point south of the place where the assassins had entered the cover.

But though they cautiously beat about in the woods for some distance they found no trace of the enemy.

"What does it all mean at all, at all?" Barney inquired of the two dark men.

But they replied only in a strange tongue and by means of pantomime invited Barney and Pomp to follow them.

This the Irishman and the darky did.

The dark men led them straight to Captain Calavaras' house.

We have seen the party arrive there and enter the presence of Frank Reade and Captain Calavaras.

Now we take up what immediately followed.

When Frank asked Barney and Pomp how they came there the Irishman made haste to relate in his own way what we have just fully set forth.

The two dark men, speaking in their own strange language to the captain, confirmed all that Barney and Pomp had done, asserting to the statement of the former.

"So, Mr. Reade, your two brave servants have saved the lives of my men, and so they have won their everlasting gratitude," said the captain.

"Yes, so it seems," assented Frank, "and I will tell you now that Barney and Pomp will be two of my most reliable men to go with us on our great voyage in the electric air yacht."

"Then as my men and yours are to be comrades in the future—for Tamos and Mora will also go with us—I will introduce them. My brave fellows, you may now speak to your new friends in the English language, which I have thoroughly taught you. You see, Mr. Reade, that they might avoid answering all questions put by the curious about

myself my men have pretended not to understand English," said Captain Calavaras.

Thereupon Tamos and Mora shook hands with Barney and Pomp warmly, and assured the two brave fellows that they would be always their true friends.

"Beggorra, an' it's loikin' til know all that hez taken place here me-self is," said Barney to Frank then.

"Tell them all," Captain Calavaras replied.

Frank did so.

"Faith, an' it's a happy mon I am til think yez were not kilt intirely be the blackguards!" cried Barney heartily.

"Dat de sentiments ob de colcred representative too," said Pomp.

"But, begorra, and is it true, thin, we are goin' on a great voyage?" asked Barney.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GUNPOWDER PLOT.

"As your two faithful men are to be members of the crew of the electric air yacht, you may as well tell them all about our proposed voyage, I think," said Captain Calavaras.

"With your permission, then, I will acquaint them with the facts," replied Frank.

As briefly he did so, Barney and Pomp listened in wonder and interest.

It had been a long time since they had been on a voyage, and both were delighted at the prospect of peril and adventure ahead.

They had become so used to peril and adventure and strange experiences in unknown lands that they could no longer content themselves with a humdrum, every-day life at home.

"Whoop! an' it's many a big ruction we will have among the Aztecs. Beggorra, Pomp, me jewel, we hev something to live for yet. We'll bate the heads av the blackguards av the wurruld down in Central America!" cried Barney.

And he and Pomp began to dance about in high glee.

"Dat's de talk! I'se achin' to butt somebody fo' keeps, an' my ole Winchester am good fo' many a dead shot yet!" cried the darky.

Then followed some further conversation between Frank Reade and Captain Calavaras about their proposed voyage.

And while they talked there was an unseen and unsuspected spy near who heard all.

The window was open.

A man crouched under it.

He was one of the three assassins who had encountered Barney and Pomp at the cabin in the woods.

He had come back to Captain Calavaras' house on a scout, after eluding the two dark men and Frank Reade's faithful servants.

The fellow had scaled the wall about the house, climbing with the skill of a monkey to do so, and once in the yard, he found no trouble in reaching the window.

At length Frank Reade and his two servants left Captain Calavaras' house, carrying with them the fifty thousand dollars which the captain had paid Frank on the spot.

Soon after that the spy stole away from the window.

As he went he muttered:

"So, so; this Americano inventor has engaged to serve Calavaras. He is going with him in his electric air vessel to the land of the Aztecs. Carrambo! It shall never be. Never. The electric vessel shall never sail. Never! Never!"

The villain was a Mexican, one of the henchmen of the white rascal who was Calavaras' foe, and who had escaped from the Aztecs, and was now after the great gold secret of that race, held in trust by the captain.

Creeping to the wall that surrounded the grounds of the mansion, the villain scaled it, impassable though the barrier would have been to an ordinary man.

Then he made for the woods, in which he had eluded the dark men and Frank's servants.

There he found his two comrades.

One was an American—a burly red-faced and red-bearded ruffian, clad in Mexican costume.

"Senor Haskell," said the spy, addressing the American, who was really the man who had escaped from the Aztecs, and the deadly foe of Calavaras. "I bring bad news."

"What have you learned, Quarto?" demanded Haskell.

"I listened at the window of Calavaras' house, and learned he had hired Frank Reade, Jr., the great American inventor, to sail with him to the land of the Aztes, in a wonderful air vessel Reade has built. Calavaras means to carry the gold secret to the young Aztec king now and set him free."

"Ha! this is bad news. But I'll foil Calavaras and the American," cried Haskell.

"How?" asked Quarto.

"We will destroy the air vessel."

"When?"

"This very night."

"Bravo! But how can we do so?"

"I have heard in the town, that all Reade's inventions are built in the large building we saw in the rear of his mansion to-day."

"Yes."

"We will go there."

"It is a dangerous thing to do. Reade's men are tigers in a fight."

"We must not meet them."

"No, no!"

"Secretly, before the dawn of another day, we will enter the workshop of Frank Reade, and blow up his air vessel."

"Let us hear your plans fully."

"Draw near, then."

The two Mexicans came close to the plotting scoundrel, and the latter then went on to develop a daring scheme for the destruction of Frank Reade's latest and greatest invention.

The night had now well advanced.

"There is no time to be lost!" said the conspirator in conclusion.

Then he led his followers away through the woods.

Meantime, on the way home, Frank said to Barney and Pomp.

"Somehow the premonition is strong upon me that the assassins whom I encountered at the house of Captain Calavaras will cause me more trouble, and they may strike at the air yacht, if by any chance they learn that I mean to employ the vessel in the service of the captain."

"Begorra, that's so."

"So it am."

"I think, Barney, you and Pomp had better sleep in the workshop hereafter, until we sail."

"Good. Sure an' we'll slape there to-night, an' wan of us won't slape, either. We'll take turns kapin' awake an' watchin'," said the Irishman.

"Dat's so," assented Pomp.

So it was arranged.

Pomp and Barney entered the workshop when they reached Frank's residence.

Frank went into his mansion and retired.

Pomp took the first watch in the work-house. He soon heard Barney snoring away on a bunk by the door.

Pomp made himself as comfortable as possible. He got out his pipe and smoked for a long time.

All was silence.

Pomp became very sleepy. He tried hard to keep awake. His head began to nod. At last he too slept.

And at that very moment the men who were bent upon destroying the electric air yacht were near.

They were creeping up to the workshop.

They reached the door and gently tried it and satisfied themselves that it was secured.

Then they went around to a side window and tried it. It was fast.

Still they made no noise and yet neither Pomp or Barney awoke.

Working with skill the villains covered the glass of a window pane with a sheet of putty. Then they broke it noiselessly. A hand was thrust through the opening and the fastener of the window was removed.

Silently the window was then opened and Haskell, his feet incased in moccasins, so that he walked noiselessly came through the window.

Like a shadow he stole across the great room to the Electric Air Yacht.

There he paused.

The wonderful aerial vessel rested upon wooden supports—three feet above the floor.

Haskell crept under the yacht.

In his hands he carried a canister of giant powder. It contained enough of the explosive to blow up a dozen air vessels like the electric yacht.

Under the ship of the air, Haskell deposited the cannister of powder.

Then he took a small box from his pocket, and having opened it drew forth a time-fuse. It was a five minute fuse.

Haskell lighted the fuse, and set it against a small opening in the cannister.

Then he stole away, reached the window, and crept out of the workshop.

"In five minutes the air-ship will be blown to atoms, and Frank Reade's workshop will be a wreck," said the villain to his comrade.

They stole away.

At some distance, in a grove in the rear of Frank Reade's residence, the villains halted.

There they meant to wait for the explosion in the workshop to take place.

The moments passed.

"One, two, three, four—five!"

Said Haskell.

Watch in hand, the villain counted the minutes.

As he uttered the word five, all the villains started.

Suddenly a sound came from the workshop.

Was the air ship doomed?

Let us see.

As Haskell stole through the window, Pomp, as good luck decreed, chanced to open his eyes, and he saw the villain.

He silently arose, and having the safety of the air ship most in mind, stole to it, and the next instant he discovered the canister of powder and the burning fuse.

Pomp's wool fairly stood on end as he understood the danger of the vessel—the peril that was so near himself and Barney.

But he instantly put out the fuse.

Then he crept to Barney's side.

"Wake up dar, Irish. Youse sleepin' while we am most done gone got blowed up," he said.

Barney was on his feet in a minute.

"What's that you say, nagur?" he cried.

Pomp repeated what he had said.

"Yer a liar!" cried Barney.

"Deed I isn't, sah."

"Begorra, it's tryin' to scare me ye are. I'll bate the head av yez."

"Come wid me, Irish, an' look fo' yerself den."

Pomp led the way to the yacht, and Barney followed him there.

"Be the tail av Biddy Nolan's goat that rached until ould Ireland an' rang St. Patrick's bell, it's the truth yez tell!" cried Barney, seeing the powder canister and the half-burned fuse.

"Where is the blackguard av the worruld that put the powder there?" he added.

Pomp pointed to the open window.

Barney bounded to it and let out a wild Irish yell.

It was that yell the villains in the grove heard, just as the five minutes the fuse was timed to burn expired.

"Dem rascals dat set de fuse an de powder am gone!" said Pomp.

"An' begorra, yez let thim go, an' yez didn't wake me up, ye blackguard av the worruld, yez hav robbed me av a fine chance for a ruction wid thim, an' I'll bate the head av yez!" cried the Irishman.

Barney made a pass at Pomp.

But the darky dodged the blow, and retreating cried out:

"Dis yere ain't no time fo' nonsense! I'se a gwine to tell Mars Frank!"

Pomp was off for the mansion like a shot.

Meantime, the disappointed villain, hearing Barney's wild yell, knew their plot had miscarried.

Led by Haskell, they hastened away, while the prime rascal hissed between his teeth:

"I'll have my revenge on Calavaras and get the gold secrets of the Aztecs yet. Frank Reade, as the friend of Calavaras, is now my foe. He, too, shall die!"

Pomp made the door bell of Frank's house jingle like a fire-alarm.

Frank was awakened and he sprang up, and ran to the door half dressed.

"Mars Frank! Dem rascals almost done gone an' done it!" panted Pomp.

"What! Have they made an attempt against the air-ship?"

"Yes, Mars Frank".

The young inventor kept a loaded Winchester standing in the hall. He snatched it up, and without pausing to hear more, ran to the workshop, closely followed by Pomp.

At the door of the shop stood Barney.

"Begob, an' the blackguards are gone and the electric air yacht is safe yet," he said.

"Thank heaven for that!" cried Frank, fervently.

He approached his wonderful vessel and saw that it had not been injured. Then Pomp told how he had seen the villain leaving the shop through the window, and what he had done.

Frank commended his act highly, and for the rest of the night he remained in the shop with Barney and the darky.

But the enemy did not come there again.

In the morning Dr. Vaneyke called at an early hour. He found Frank still in the workshop, and the young inventor related to him the events of the night.

Frank confided to his old friend the wonderful story of Captain Calavaras, and when the doctor had heard it all, and stated that he was much interested in the remarkable narrative, he added:

"Frank, you must let me accompany you on your voyage to the land of the Aztecs."

"The very thing I wish for, I would not know how to do without you. By all means you shall go," said Frank.

"Me, too, by jove, don't cher know!" piped the voice of the little dude reporter of the Daily Trumpet.

Frank and the doctor turned and saw Felix Frolix standing in the door of the shop.

He had just arrived in time to overhear the last two remarks.

"My dear fellow, you know you promised me I should go on your next voyage," added Felix.

"So I did. Well, I will not go back on my word; but we are going to a dangerous place, and we may all meet our death there," replied Frank seriously.

"I go to write for fame and my best girl. So by Jove! come what may, Felix Frolix won't back out!" said the little dude.

There was another arrival at the shop a moment later. No less an important personage than Captain Calavaras himself.

He was duly introduced to the doctor and the little dude.

Then the doctor said:

"About the improvements we were to discuss?"

"Oh, yes. You know I thought of putting on board a little electric road wagon I've made, so that in case we broke down at any time and had to go a long distance for anything needed for repairs, the journey could be quickly made," said Frank.

"Yes," assented the doctor, "and I strongly advise you to take the little electric road vehicle along."

"Then we will call that point settled. The road wagon shall be carried on the electric yacht."

"When can you start?" asked Captain Calavaras, looking at the electric air yacht in wonder and admiration.

CHAPTER VIII.

LAUNCHING THE ELECTRIC AIR YACHT.

POMP saved the electric air yacht.

For a moment, after he had extinguished the time fuse, the darky stood spell-bound by the sense of awful peril that was upon him.

"To-morrow I shall have a crew of ten men, consisting of yourself, captain, Dr. Vaneyke, Mr. Frolix, the eminent newspaper reporter, your two men, Tamos and Mora, Pomp, Barney, myself, and two new hands whom I will engage in town to-day. I have the two men in mind. They have both worked for me, and are good mechanics, and likely to enlist for this great voyage."

"Good, the sooner we can sail the better. How about the supplies?" asked the captain.

"I'll have them all put on board the yacht to-day and to-morrow. We will make a start at precisely ten o'clock A. M."

"Will you please explain the working of your wonderful vessel?" asked the captain.

"With pleasure," replied Frank.

And he went on to describe the yacht in detail, but we have already heard him explain it to Felix Frolix.

That day was a busy one for Frank and all hands interested in the great voyage to be begun in the morning.

But the enemy made no further attempt against the vessel. The yacht was all ready to sail at ten o'clock next day.

It was drawn out in the open lot beside the shop, and Frank, having seen the twin gas reservoir properly filled, and tested the electric machinery, called the roll of his crew.

All responded save one man.

Frank had enlisted the two men of the village he had spoken of. They were called John Bolton and David Cook.

The man who did not answer, when his name was called, was David Cook.

But John Bolton stepped forward, and said:

"Cook sent word to me this morning, to tell you that, on account of a sudden death in his family, which occurred last night, he could not go with you. He has, however, sent this man to take his place."

As Bolton spoke a small, intelligent-looking man, dressed like a mechanic, came forward from among the immense crowd that had assembled to witness the launching of the air vessel.

Somehow the news had spread about the town that Frank was to sail in his new invention that day.

Frank recognized the man who came in Cook's place, as a sober, industrious mechanic named "Danvers," who had been for some time in town working in a car shop there. The man once applied to Frank for a situation, but not being in need of his services just then Frank had not hired him.

The young inventor talked with Danvers a few moments, and then accepted him in Cook's place.

All hands had already said good-bye to their families and friends, and all went on board the air vessel.

Frank gave each man his office.

John Bolton was appointed chief engineer.

Danvers was named for helmsman.

Barney, assistant helmsman.

Pomp, cook.

Tamos and Mora, deck-hands.

Felix Frolix, master of electric lights and alarm bell.

Captain Calavaras, chief gunner.

Dr. Vanayke, assistant gunner.

Of course Frank Reade was captain of the vessel.

At last, when every man was at his post, Frank gave the word to cut the stay-ropes.

CHAPTER IX.

OFF FOR THE LAND OF THE AZTECS—FELIX FROLIX'S PERIL.

IN obedience to Frank's order the stay ropes, that held the electric air yacht to the earth were severed, then, like a thing of life—majestically, grandly, the vessel soared toward the sky.

Up, up it went, while the cheers of the multitude below rang out, and all present were filled with wonder and admiration.

Frank caused the stars and stripes to be run up from the flagstaff set in the bow, at one side of the carriage of the great cannon planted there.

Then another tremendous outburst of applause came from the assembled crowd.

Soon an elevation of several hundred feet was reached.

Then Frank gave engineer John Bolton his orders.

Bolton was at his post before the levers of the wonderful electric engine in the apartment below deck, specially set apart for the driving machinery of the vessel.

There were several highly-polished steel levers—these connecting the machinery with the dynamos—and by means of the levers the engineer could control the action of the electricity in much the same manner that the locomotive engineer controls steam-power.

Each of the levers had a number painted on the frame work above its bearings.

Bolton was familiar with these numbers, and he had only to glance at them to know what lever to depress or raise to increase or decrease the propelling power of any one or all of the great fans or horizontal propelling wheels.

The engineer, hearing Frank's order through a speaking tube reaching from the engine to the deck, immediately depressed all the levers.

Then came a great whirring sound—the electric currents from the powerful dynamos under the engine was at once set free.

The wonderful subtle, invisible power was communicated to the machinery, and directly the great screws of the propellor began to move.

At first slowly they revolved, then faster and faster, until the eight great air paddle-wheels, on each side of the electric air yacht, were revolving with the speed of a side-wheel steamer in a race.

Away sped the yacht of the air.

Frank gave the helmsman his course, saying:

"South by southwest."

Captain Calavaras, standing in the bow—a grand figure in mid air—removed his wide hat from his splendid head, and looked away toward the land of the hidden remnant of the once powerful race of the Aztes.

There was a far off look in his fine eyes and his lips moved.

Perhaps he was offering up a silent prayer to the great ruler of earth and air, asking that success might attend the mission of humanity and justice, upon which he and Frank Reade, Jr., had so heroically set out.

Danvers—the new hand—at his post as helmsman, steered according to Frank's directions, and the electric air yacht went due south by southwest at a speed which caused Captain Calavaras to exclaim:

"Ah, this is grand! Mr. Reade, you have indeed conquered the elements."

The view of the landscape below was something worth a lifetime to witness. A grand panorama set by nature, which it is given no man save the daring aeronaut to witness.

The earth seemed in motion. It seemed to speed by the electric yacht at racing speed. A wonderful blending it was of forests, plains, green fields and villages.

Here and there a river or a stream was seen glittering in the sunlight like a pathway of silver.

Felix Frolix clapped his hands in delight as he cried out:

"Splendid! Amazing! I must make a note of this for the Daily Trumpet."

Then out came his note-book and pencil, and perched on the bow-gun, he began to scribble away for dear life.

It did not seem to enter his little head that possibly this was labor lost—that he and his note-book might never return again to the land the electric air yacht was so fast leaving behind.

But in his enthusiasm, the dude reporter was happy, happy in a dream of the fame the history of this wonderful voyage, written up by himself, would bring him.

Already he signed himself on his note-book, "Professor Felix Frolix, the eminent explorer of the air."

Frank Reade and the doctor stood by the rail. They were silent. This was no new experience to these old aerial voyagers.

But they enjoyed the grandeur and beauty of it all, none the less.

There are moments when the wonders of nature impress man, and cast his thoughts in channels of a serious nature.

Such was now the case with Frank and the good doctor.

They felt they were actually sailing into the unknown. Perhaps they realized something of the sentiments the poets sought to give "the ancient mariner" when he sailed into the unknown seas.

Tamos and Mora—the two dark sons of the ancient race of Mexico—stood near the captain, whom they had devotedly followed from their hidden lands.

Awe, wonder, and fear were depicted on their swarthy, intelligent faces.

Barney was in the cook's galley.

And Pomp was there, too.

All at once the silence that reigned on board the electric vessel was broken in a laughable way.

Out of the cook's galley rushed the Irishman.

He was sputtering and yelling:

"Begob, an' it's kilt I am be the nagur! Bad scan to him!"

Water was streaming all over his face and down his breast and back.

"Sure, Master Frank, the nagur tried to drown me. It's batin' the head av the blackguard I'll be afther doin' whin I gits me breath," Barney added.

Just then Pomp's wooly head appeared at the galley door.

He had a broad grin on his face and called out tauntingly:

"Yah! Yah! Irish done fooled wid de wrong bottle dat time."

Pomp had turned the spring of a syphon bottle of vichy, while Barney was drinking through the tube. Result—a flood in the Irishman's face; consequence—a ducked-mad Irishman and a delighted dorky.

"Come out on the deck, ye blackguard av the world, an' its makin' a dorky funeral I'll be afther doin'," yelled Barney.

Pomp rushed out on deck, laughing.

Barney sprang at him. But Pomp ran and Barney followed.

Pomp made for the stern, went by the cannon there, and then up the rail to the bows.

Just then a tremendous gust of wind struck the air-ship.

The great anchor cable lay coiled in the bow against the rail, its free end dangling over it with the anchor.

The lurch of the vessel hurled Felix Frolix off his perch on the cannon, and sent Pomp against him full force.

And then horror! the little dude went over the rail, but he caught the free end of the cable in both hands, above the anchor, then the cable uncoiled.

Down, down went the little dude, shrieking in terror.

But he clung to the cable for dear life.

The end of the cable was made fast to a capstan on deck.

The dude continued to shoot down through space, until finally the end of the coil was reached—the whole length of the cable was unwound.

Shouts of alarm sounded from Pomp and Barney.

They both sought to hold the cable from unwinding, but the weight

of the anchor added to that of the dude carried it down the whole length.

Frank Reade rushed to the speaking-tube.

The doctor sprang to the side of the deck house.

While Frank shouted to the engineer to slow up, the doctor pressed the electric button in the side of the deck house.

Immediately the alarm bell rang.

All hands, save the helmsman and engineer, then ran to the cable as the vessel began to slacken its speed.

Looking over the side, Frank saw the little dude still clinging to the cable.

And while he looked, he noted that Felix worked his way up until his feet rested on the anchor, while he clung to the cable.

"There is still hope for him!" said Frank.

"Hold on! Hold on for your life!" he shouted.

Then all hands began to work the handles of the revolving capstan, and wind up the cable.

Slowly the little dude on the anchor was drawn up.

At last he was within reach of friendly hands. Pomp and Barney caught him and pulled him upon the deck.

Felix was quite white with terror.

He sank down as limp as a rag.

But the next moment he pulled out his note-book and pencil.

"I must make a note of this. Thrilling experience of Professor Frolix in mid-air," he said, faintly.

CHAPTER X.

NIGHT ON THE PLAINS—THE APACHES.

THE thrilling episode just narrated put all thought of fighting out of the heads of Pomp and Barney.

They and all the others congratulated the dude reporter on his narrow escape from a terrible fate.

Presently, when the voyage was resumed, Captain Calavaras approached Frank and the doctor, at the door of the deck house.

"Gentlemen," said the captain, in his courteous way, "I wish to tell you something more about my enemies."

"We shall be glad to know more about them," replied Frank.

"Certainly," said the doctor.

"Very well, the white man, who was wrecked with me among the Aztecs, is named Bart Haskell. The beginning of his enmity arose long before we were wrecked on the desolate coast of Central America."

"Haskell and I loved the same lady. I won her fairly and honorably for my wife. But she was soon taken from me by death. From the time I became the successful suitor of my sainted bride Haskell hated me as only one of his evil nature can hate. He was second-mate on the vessel of which I was captain, which was wrecked. He had influence with the owner, and against my will held his position with my crew.

"That he is a wretch without one spark of honesty in his soul is proven by his conduct in stealing the gold of the Aztecs who spared his life and treated him kindly, who saved him when he was starving, to say nothing of his plot to steal the secret of the old Aztec king from me and murder me.

"He is the friend and confidant of the villainous Aztec warrior who has gotten up the revolution in the Aztec land and imprisoned the boy king I mean to save.

"The two Mexicans, who have become the confederates of Haskell, since he escaped from the Aztecs, and who share his confidence, being leagued with him to secure the gold secret I hold, are villains of the worst stamp. They are named Quarto and Alvas.

Now, since the three rascals failed to kill me, and secure the secret in Readestown, and as it is clear from the attempt they made to destroy the Electric Yacht, that they know we mean to sail to the land of the Aztecs, I fear we shall have trouble with them there."

"Do you think they will dare follow us?" Frank asked.

And as he spoke he started.

The doctor began to look troubled.

"Yes. Since Haskell's friend—the villainous Aztec warrior—called 'Incati,' is now it seems in power, in the realm of the young king.

"I fear that Haskell will guide his Mexican allies to the land of the Aztecs, and there range on the side of Incati against us and the young king."

"It seems probable," assented Frank.

"Yes," said the doctor.

"Incati will no doubt accept Haskell and the Mexicans as allies, because he, too, is after the gold secret of his race. Once he knows I hold it, as Haskell will be sure to tell him, they will strike a bargain and seek to murder us all and get the secret."

"Do you carry it with you?" asked Frank.

"Yes; because since circumstances, which the old king did not foresee, seems to direct that I should deliver it to the young king without waiting for him to reach the age of twenty-one."

"What are these circumstances?"

"Why, the rebellion, the accession of Incati to power. The Aztecs are much impoverished. With the gold from the hidden treasure-place the young king could win over to his side the warriors of Incati, who are half hearted in their allegiance to the usurper. And I know many of them are not altogether devoted to Incati at heart. But they have acted, as poor human creatures often do in civilized lands—that is to say, follow the side of power from selfish interests."

"I see," said Frank. "And I think you have acted wisely in bringing the secret with you and in resolving to restore the treasure to the young king as soon as you can."

"Yes. Such were he now living would I believe be the desire of the old king, I am sure."

"Captain," said the doctor, "what you have just so clearly set forth to us certainly tends to make us anticipate most serious complications and increase the danger of our great undertaking."

"It does. Still I do not shrink from it."

"Nor I," said Frank.

"Neither do I for a moment think of doing so," affirmed the good old scientist, firmly.

All that day the electric air yacht sailed on.

Nothing of moment transpired, however, until night came on, then it began to drizzle, and soon a dense fog enveloped the air ship.

Felix Frolix as master of electric lights, saw that the lights were turned on.

The great reflector sent its rays through the fog but a comparatively short distance.

There was danger of some accident, and Frank decided to make a landing.

The necessary orders were given, the electricity was turned off from the propeller.

Then Frank went to the generating room and drew off the gas from the great twin reservoir-globes that held the vessel up.

Slowly the vessel settled down.

Finally it gently settled on the land.

The elastic spiral springs, under the hull, now served well the purpose for which they were there placed.

There was no shock or jar when the vessel reached the earth.

Frank and his comrades saw they were on the prairies of the southwest.

They had made a long run that day.

On the earth the fog was even more dense than at the elevation whence the yacht of the air had descended.

The electric light only penetrated the fog a short distance.

All was silence on the vast solitude around the air-ship, save only for the distant howling of the wandering wolves, and the cries of strange night birds.

When an excellent supper, prepared by Pomp, had been eaten, a watch was set consisting of Pomp and Barney.

Then the others turned in for the night.

But, at midnight, it was understood that the Irishman and the darky were to be relieved by Tamos and Mora, the two retainers of Captain Calavaras.

In his cabin Frank soon fell asleep.

Silence reigned on the air vessel, and while Pomp stood at the stern of the deck Barney kept watch in the bow.

Of course no danger was anticipated.

But experience had taught Frank the necessity of being over watchful.

The hours passed. It was toward midnight.

All at once Barney heard an exclamation from Pomp.

"Whist! what is it, me gossoon?" asked Barney, in a low and anxious voice.

But there was no reply.

Barney glanced toward the stern.

He had seen Pomp there but a moment before. But now he saw nothing of the darky.

"Where are ye, nagur?" said Barney, speaking louder.

Still he received no answer.

"Begob, an' it's thinkin' I am the nagur is up to some trick," muttered Barney.

Then he crept cautiously along the deck.

Barney reached the stern.

The Irishman paused in surprise there.

Still he could see nothing of Pomp.

"What can have become of the nagur at all, at all? Arrah! maybe the blackguard av the wurruld has crawled intil the cook's galley to stale a nap," Barney said.

He turned to go to the galley.

At that moment half a dozen dark, shadowy forms, moving as silently as shadows of the night, came stealing over the rail behind him.

An instant and they were close upon Barney.

Still not a sound.

Still the Irishman was ignorant of their presence.

One of the dark forms came close to Barney.

He raised his right arm. His hand held a lasso.

Swish! With such a sound the coil shot through the air.

The loop fell squarely over Barney's head. Then, with a quick jerk it was drawn tightly about his neck.

Barney was dragged down, strangling and unable to utter a sound.

In a trice the six dark forms were upon and about him.

Unable to give the alarm poor Barney was gagged and securely bound hand and foot.

Then he was dropped over the rail.

Striking upon the ground he found himself beside Pomp.

There on the prairie, close to the side of the Electric Air Yacht, lay Pomp.

He too was bound and gagged.

It seemed that the vessel of the air was doomed to be captured by foes at the outset of the great voyage upon which it had started.

The six dark forms came into the light of the electric lamps. They were Indians—Apaches, savage bloodthirsty foes of all white men.

CHAPTER XI.

THROUGH THE NIGHT—FRANK AND CALAVARAS PUZZLED.

UNDER cover of the darkness, and sheltered by the dense fog, the savages had crept up to the air ship.

They had seen the lights on board the electric vessel of the air at a distance.

Coming toward the light, to see what it meant, the savages were not a little surprised to discover the air vessel.

While they had no idea what it really was, they knew when they saw Barney that it belonged to white men.

That was enough.

The redskins wanted scalps and plunder. They thought no doubt to secure both, by capturing the strange object.

Pomp had been lassoed and dragged over the side.

The exclamation which Barney heard him utter, fell from his lips, as he was strangled by the lasso.

Having gained possession of the deck of the electric yacht, the Indians carried their investigations further.

They advanced to the deck-house.

There they tried the door. But the deck-house was locked.

Then they advanced to the companionway leading to the compartments below deck.

Still they made no sound. Their moccasins were well adapted for noiseless walking.

The Indians began to steal down the companionway.

Each savage carried a rifle slung to his shoulders, and in their hands were murderous-looking tomahawks and scalping knives.

John Bolton the engineer, slept on a bunk in the engine-room, so that, without delay, he could at any time start the propeller.

The engineer chanced to be rather restless that night.

All at once he awoke. He heard the sounds of heavy breathing at the door of the engine-room.

John Bolton was startled.

"Some one is at the door listening. Who can it be that comes here thus silently at dead of night?" he said to himself.

There was a small slide in the door of the engine-room.

Bolton was a man of nerve, and he possessed considerable presence of mind.

Noiselessly he went to the door.

Without a sound he drew the little slide in the door open, and peered out through it.

What he saw gave the engineer the greatest surprise of all his life.

There, at the foot of the companion-stairs, right before the door of the engine-room, he saw the six hideously-painted Apaches.

John Bolton was not seen.

He drew the slide shut, and stared like one enthralled by the magnitude of the peril.

"Merciful heavens! The crew of the air vessel are all likely to be murdered, while they sleep, by those red fiends, unless I can save them," thought the engineer.

If he ventured out he was lost.

He knew the savages were about to try to open the door of the engine-room.

A brilliant thought flashed through the mind of Bolton.

He caught up a coil of copper wire from beside the door, and in an instant made it fast to the iron handle that passed through the door. The other end he set in the spring clasp of an electric receiver.

This was no sooner accomplished than he turned the electricity from the powerful dynamos under the engine on to the receivers.

From thence the current went along the copper wire.

Instantly the door-knobs, on each side, were heavily charged with electricity.

Circumstances favored the engineer.

The savages did not try the door until he had turned the electricity onto the door-knob.

Then one big redskin grasped the knob on the outer side.

The same instant he received a shock of tremendous power.

A terrible yell, wrung from his lips by pain and terror, rang out, and he fell in a heap.

The redskins knew then the game of surprise—the plot to kill the whites while they slept was foiled.

They yelled like mad.

Another savage sprang at the door of the engine-room, and seized the knob.

He too received a terrible shock, and fell. The other Indians were awed and amazed.

"Bad medicine! Bad medicine!" they shouted.

Retreating from the door they went along the passage leading to the cabins.

But the yell of the savage who received the first electric shock had awakened Frank Reade and the others.

They rushed out of their cabin, weapons in their hands.

Captain Calavaras was the first to appear before the four Apaches, who remained in fighting trim.

The grand adventurer had a great two-edged sword in his hand and he rushed upon the Indians fearlessly.

One went down with his head almost severed from his body by a terrible blow from the captain's mighty blade.

The next instant Tamos, Mora and Frank Reade were at the captain's side.

A revolver was fired by Frank, and another redskin fell.

The other two fled, pursued by the whites.

The Indians gained the deck, leaped over the rail and made off in the darkness.

Then Frank missed Pomp and Barney.

Search was made for them.

The Irishman and the darky were found where the Indians had left them, on the ground beside the electric air vessel.

Barney and Pomp were released, and then they explained how the vessel was surprised.

There was not much more sleep for any one that night.

Frank did not know but the savages who had fled might return with reinforcements.

He ordered the voyage to be resumed.

But before his gas was turned on and the two great globes inflated he directed that the dead Indians be thrown overboard.

That was done.

It was found that the two savages who had received the electric shocks were dead, as the two killed by Captain Calavaras and Frank in the passage below deck.

Through the fog and darkness the electric air yacht sailed on, when a considerable elevation was reached.

"Still run south by southwest!" ordered Frank, addressing the helmsman.

Danvers—the new hand—had a compass before him.

He assured Frank that the yacht was going in the direction the young inventor wished.

Felix Frolix as soon as the Indians were repulsed got out his notebook and began to write.

Frank looked over his shoulder and read the following heading, as the little dude wrote it:

"The electric air yacht attacked by Indians. Heroic conduct of Professor Felix Frolix. The savages repulsed. The vessel saved by the bravery of the representative of the Daily Trumpet."

Felix had the true instincts of a reporter.

"You will get along," said Frank, laughing.

When morning dawned the fog lifted.

Frank took an observation through a field-glass.

He saw a wild country.

There were mountains, forests and dark defiles.

Captain Calavaras presently received the glass from Frank's hands.

He scanned the country.

Intently he looked for a long time.

At last he lowered the glass and said to Frank:

"Have you ever traveled in this part of the world before?"

"Yes."

"Where should you say we were?"

"That's what troubles me."

"I should say so."

"I know of no country like this we should have reached by this time."

"Nor I."

"What mountains are those?"

"They look to me like the Rockies."

"I should say the same."

Frank Reade looked troubled, and so did Captain Calavaras.

He shook his head.

"I am puzzled. Can it be we have changed our course during the night and gone due west?"

"I gave the helmsman his course all right. He had the compass. He could not have gone wrong."

"So it seems."

"And yet those mountains are the Rockies, of that I am now positive. I recognize them surely."

"I'll speak to the helmsman."

"Do so."

Frank walked up to Danvers.

The captain went with him, and Frank spoke to Danvers.

CHAPTER XII.

A TRAITOR DETECTED—THE BLAZING TOWN.

"WHAT course have you kept during the night?" asked Frank of the helmsman.

"Why, south by southwest, just as you ordered, sir," replied Danvers, looking surprised.

"Are you sure?" continued Frank, and as he spoke the doctor came up.

"Certainly, sir. But look at the compass for yourself, if you please."

"I will."

Frank turned to the compass.

He saw that the hands indicated that the vessel was sailing due south by southwest.

"You are quite right, Danvers. You have held and are still holding the yacht to the course we wish to follow."

"Why did you doubt it?" asked the doctor, as he looked at the compass closely.

Frank and the captain explained.

While they were talking the trio walked to the deck-house.

There they halted.

The doctor listened to all that Frank and the captain had to say.

Then he remarked:

"Did you observe anything peculiar about the compass?"

"No," Frank replied.

"And you, captain?"

"The compass seemed to be all right," Calavaras answered.

"I think not," said the doctor.
 "What do you mean?" cried Frank.
 "Yes, tell us," said Captain Calavaras, eagerly.
 "I noticed the needle of the compass did not seem to vibrate freely.
 "Ha! doctor, you startle me!" cried Frank. "Do you suspect anything?"
 "Yes."
 "What?"
 "That the compass has been tampered with."
 "Impossible!"
 "I think I am right."
 "What could be their object?"
 "That I do not know."
 "Who could have meddled with the compass?"
 "Who has charge of it?"
 "The helmsman."
 "Then he is the man to suspect."
 "Ha! Danvers is a new hand."
 "Come," said the captain. "Let us examine the compass."
 "Yes," assented Frank.
 The three men walked back to the helmsman.
 Frank inspected the compass.
 Meanwhile the captain and Doctor Vaneyke noted that Danvers began to look uneasy.
 Suddenly Frank exclaimed:
 "See here!"
 As he spoke he held up a bit of magnetized steel.
 "I found that in the compass!" added Frank.
 "Ha! see! see! since you have removed the magnet the needle points due west, straight for the Pacific Ocean!" cried the doctor.
 Frank and Captain Calavaras saw that it was indeed just as he said.
 They stood looking at each other meaningly and in silence for a moment.
 The helmsman was quite pale, but he looked determined.
 "Danvers, did you place the steel magnet in the compass?" asked Frank sternly.
 "No, sir."
 "Come, sir, suspicion indicates you. I am convinced you are guilty."
 "I say I am not."
 "You had better confess the truth."
 "I have nothing to confess."
 "Take care. Do not add falsehood to your duplicity."
 "I deny all knowledge that the compass had been tampered with. There are other men beside myself on board whom you do not know much about."
 Danvers glanced at Captain Calavaras.
 "Do you mean me, you rascal?" the latter asked.
 Danvers looked sullen, and was silent.
 Captain Calavaras drew Frank aside and whispered:
 "Let me deal with the man. I read guilt in his face. I'll make him confess."
 Frank hesitated.
 He was a generous man and always willing to give the suspected the benefit of a doubt.
 "Let the captain have his way. It will be right to do so," said the doctor.
 "Very well. I leave you to deal with Danvers," said Frank.
 "Good!" replied the captain.
 Then he stepped up to Danvers.
 "My man," said Calavaras sternly, "do you see this revolver?"
 He drew a revolver as he spoke, and leveled it at the head of Danvers.
 "I am not blind," said the helmsman sullenly.
 "Very well. I read guilt in your eyes. I'll give you five minutes to confess the truth. At the end of that time, if you have not spoken, I shall send a bullet through your head."
 The captain's eyes flashed.
 He looked very terrible.
 With his disengaged hand he drew his watch from his pocket.
 "I appeal to you, Mr. Reade. You are chief here. Will you allow me to be covered by that pirate?"
 "Pirate!" exclaimed Calavaras, suddenly paling. "Ha! now I am sure you are a villain, and I know who told you I was a pirate. Yes, and too well I know the liar's name. Shall I tell it to you, you traitor? Ha! I will. It is Bart Haskell!"
 An involuntary cry burst from the lips of Danvers, and he began to tremble.
 Captain Calavaras was like one who meant to show no mercy.
 "Now you shall die!" he added.
 He cocked his revolver.
 "Hold! hold! I acknowledge my guilt," cried Danvers.
 "I thought you would. Come, I will tell your story for you. You were hired to come as one of the crew of the ship. The man Cook was bribed to let you take his place."
 "Yes," whined Danvers, now thoroughly intimidated.
 "Was Bolton in the plot?"
 "No. Cook made him believe he could not go."
 "I'll stake my life on Bolton's honesty!" said Frank.
 "Now then, tell us. Bart Haskell hired you to betray the air yacht to destruction," went on the captain, speaking to Danvers.
 "Yes," assented the helmsman.

"But first you were to seal something from me."
 "Yes."
 "Then while you made sure of your own safety you meant to doom us all."
 Danvers nodded.
 "Mr. Reade, what shall be done with this man?"
 "I shall merely put him off the vessel and leave him to his fate."
 "Good. I see a mining town or camp away to the north. He may make his way there if he isn't killed by the Indians," replied Calavaras, taking up a field-glass.
 "Yes," assented Frank.
 Then the vessel was lowered.
 When the ground was reached Pomp and Barney hustled Danvers over the rail. Then the vessel was elevated and Captain Calavaras took the helm.
 The proper course was now taken.
 Swiftly the vessel sailed southwest.
 Then, toward noon, the course was made due south.
 Barney relieved the captain at the helm, and he instructed Tamos and Mora in the art of managing the wheel.
 They were competent to act as helmsman before the day ended.
 Just at nightfall a light was seen on an elevation.
 It was very brilliant.
 "That looks like the light of a great conflagration. See, the glow is on the sky," said Frank.
 All hands save the engineer were on deck, and all were looking at the distant fire.
 "It looks as if a whole city was burning," said Captain Calavaras.
 "We will sail toward it, and seek to find out what the cause of the fire really is," said Frank.
 Accordingly the course of the electric air yacht was immediately changed.
 The vessel was headed for the fire.
 Soon it was near enough to the fire for the men on the deck to make out that there was a large Mexican town in flames.
 The conflagration had already made great headway.
 The inhabitants were fleeing. They seemed to have no fire department—no means with which to combat the flames.
 The electric air yacht was soon over the burning town.
 "We are powerless to put out the great fire or render the people assistance," said Frank.
 Just then he reeled against Captain Calavaras. The yacht experienced a shock as the propeller suddenly stopped.
 The next moment Frank and his comrades experienced a sensation of falling. The yacht was sinking straight down upon the blazing town.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ELECTRIC AIR YACHT DISABLED—TROUBLE WITH MEXICANS.

THE horror of the situation was indescribable.
 "Oh, Lordy! we am goners dis time suah. Oh, Marse Frank, de balloons am busted. De balloons am boff sprung a leak!" yelled Pomp.
 Frank saw it was so.
 The fall of the yacht could not be stopped.
 For one full moment the awful doom of being burned to death in the flames of the town below them stared the crew of the air-ship in the face.
 The horror of it all was sufficient to benumb their senses and render them unable to move.
 But a kind Providence was watching over them.
 All at once one of those sudden southern winds which without warning often sweeps over the plains of Mexico like a cyclone struck the air-vessel as it was falling straight toward the terrific conflagration.
 The vessel shot forward before the tornado as if impelled by the power of a dozen dynamos.
 The cyclone carried the vessel half a mile beyond the burning town before it finally reached terra firma.
 The electric yacht—wind-driven—struck the earth with such force in this instance that despite the elasticity of the spiral springs under the hull there was a shock.
 In a moment the cyclone had passed. The flagstaff had been blown away. The stern cannon was torn from its carriage, part of the rail was gone, and the roof of the deck house was injured.
 But not one of the crew of the vessel had been blown overboard.
 Seeing the cyclone coming, all on deck had thrown themselves down flat and clung desperately to whatever they could grasp.
 When the cyclone had passed Frank Reade, the doctor, and Captain Calavaras surveyed the vessel.
 "I cannot comprehend why the balloons both became ruptured at the same time at the moment the propellers stopped. It certainly looks to me as if there was treachery at work again," said Frank.
 "It strikes me that way," answered the doctor.
 "It is certainly a suspicious coincidence that all the calamities should come at once," observed Captain Calavaras.
 "We will soon see into the mystery," rejoined Frank.
 He started to climb up a ladder that led to one of the collapsed globes.
 Just then Engineer John Bolton came on deck.
 "Mr. Reade," said he, "I have just found that the main communicators, by which the electricity reaches the driving machine from the dynamos, has been filed almost off, so that at last it suddenly broke, so shutting off the motive power all at once."
 "Danvers' rascally work!" exclaimed Captain Calavaras.

"No doubt," assented Frank.

Going on up the ladder, he soon discovered where the balloon he was examining had been almost cut through with a sharp instrument, so that under great pressure of the gas inside the globe the rent had been made complete.

An examination of the other balloon revealed precisely the same state of things there.

The secret was out.

Danvers was responsible for the fall of the air yacht.

While the others slept, he must have done his treacherous work. It was evident he had meant soon to desert the yacht, believing he had made sure of its ultimate ruin.

The indignation of Frank Reade and his comrades may be imagined.

But there was nothing for them to do but to set to work to repair the damage as best they could.

Frank estimated it would take three days to do the work.

He at once visited the supply locker, below deck, to get out the material needed.

Everything he required was found, and without delay all hands set to work.

The vessel had landed in a little open glade.

On all sides the glade was surrounded by woods, so it was not likely the vessel would be seen by any one at a distance.

Frank superintended the work of repairing the yacht.

All went well for two days.

On the third day, a little after noon, while there was almost half a day's work yet to be done, a party of four mounted Mexicans rode into the glade from the surrounding woods.

At the sight of the air ship and the strange men at work on it the Mexicans drew rein.

In wonder they stared at the vessel.

Then, jabbering away excitedly in Spanish, they suddenly wheeled their horses and galloped away.

They had not come near enough to allow Frank or his men to hear what they said. Frank and Captain Calvaras, and the doctor also, understood Spanish. They would have been much startled could they have heard what the Mexican horsemen said among themselves.

It was that their town had been set on fire by unknown incendiaries, and that finding the strangers hidden in the woods with their vessel, they suspected they had a hand in setting fire to the town.

The town had been entirely consumed. The cyclone had driven the flames through it in great fury.

The inhabitants had mostly escaped, and they were encamped near the site of their town.

From that camp the mounted Mexicans had come, and to it they returned at full speed, and made haste to communicate to the town people that they believed they had found the men who had fired the town.

At this time the relations between our government and Mexico was much strained, and there were rumors that war between the two nations was impending.

The people of the burned town were very bitter against all Americans, and no sooner did the horsemen make known their suspicions regarding Frank Reade, Jr., and his party, than it was voted to arrest the strangers, and make them give an account of themselves.

The Mexican horsemen had recognized the crew of the air yacht as Americans at once. Half an hour after the mounted men discovered the air yacht, they returned to it, followed by a hundred or more men on foot.

"Begorra, here comes the yellow nagurs an' greasers, an' be gob, it's thinkin' I am they are after a ruction!" cried Barney, as he saw the Mexicans come out of the woods.

It was as evident to Frank and the others that the Mexicans meant mischief.

They shouted and brandished their arms.

"Arrah! Bad scan til the blackguards! Now it's a happy man I'll be if only they'll give us a bit av diversion by the way av a fight. Sure an' it's dying for a ruction I am," continued Barney, and he dropped down on a deck-seat where Pomp had just set a bent pin for his especial accommodation.

"Whoop!" yelled the Irishman, leaping to his feet. "Sure, an' it's stabbed I am, an' it's the nagur done it. Be the shamrock an' I'll bate the head av the blackguard."

He rushed at Pomp.

But the darky ducked and Barney's momentum carried him off the deck through a broken opening in the rail.

The Mexicans on horseback were now quite close, and they started to charge on Barney, when Pomp snatched up a Winchester rifle and leveled it at them, shouting:

"Halt, dar, you'se yeller niggers fo' I dones shoot de tops ob yer heads off!"

The Mexicans drew rein and Barney scrambled back on deck.

Felix Frolix had his note-book out, and he said as he wrote:

"A terrible disaster to the air ship. While disabled, and on the ground, it is attacked by Mexicans. Prof. Felix Frolix orders the Mexicans to disperse, in the name of the United States. They flee. Frolix's presence of mind again saves the vessel."

But the Mexicans did not flee, though. Pomp had halted them. In a moment they seemed about to advance. But only one of the mounted men came toward the air yacht.

When he was near it he shouted in Spanish:

"I call upon you to surrender! We suspect you were concerned in burning our town, and you must go before the alcalde for trial."

"Not much we won't. To do so would be to walk into a trap. Those fellows would find us guilty," said Frank in a low voice.

And he added:

"Train the cannon on the Mexicans, and run up the Stars and Stripes!"

CHAPTER XIV.

SAVED BY THE ELECTRIC RIFLE—THE LAND OF THE AZTECS.

FRANK's orders were promptly obeyed. The stars and stripes were run up at the head of a new flag-staff, which had been set in place of the one blown away by the cyclone.

And the bow and stern cannon were trained on the Mexicans.

Then Frank shouted:

"We are peaceable American citizens. We know nothing of the cause of the destructive conflagration which has visited your town. We mean to go in peace if we can, but if you come any nearer, or attempt to arrest us forcibly, we will open fire on you with our cannon!"

The tones of the young inventor were firm and determined.

The spokesman of the Mexicans eyed the two cannon on the electric air yacht for a moment, as if he sought to make sure they really were cannon.

Then he said:

"You Americanos are liars! You say you want to go in peace, yet you are building a sort of strange fort on Mexican soil. We are not fools, we see you are preparing to stay here. The land here is mine. But enough. We will arrest you."

As he spoke the last words, the Mexican wheeled his horse and galloped back to his comrades.

"Hole on dar, yeller nigger! I'se got suffin' to offer. I'se willin' to fight youse fa'r an' squar to settle all dis yere trouble!" cried Pomp.

But the Mexican kept on toward his friends, and paid not the slightest attention to Pomp's challenge.

"Is it a ruction yez want, nagur? Thin, here it is, begob!" cried Barney, coming up behind Pomp.

As the darky turned, the Irishman made a pass at him, but Pomp dodged.

Before he could butt, as he evidently meant to do, Barney clinched him.

They rolled over and over along the deck.

"Here, here!" cried Frank. "This is no time for nonsense. Every man to work, save the gunner. The Mexicans are in dead earnest, they may bring a thousand men to attack us. We must get the repairs completed and sail away before it is too late."

As Frank spoke he snatched up a bucket of cold water that stood on the deck, and having lost all patience with them, he hurled the contents of the bucket all over the two irrepressibles.

That dampened their ardor.

They got up and went about their work.

But Pomp muttered something about "gettin' squar' wid dat Irish yer."

All hands worked with a will at the repairs now.

But as we have said there was almost half a day's work yet to be performed, before the electric air yacht could proceed on her voyage.

The situation was most alarming.

"What would you advise us to do to hold off the Mexicans, Captain Calavaras?" said Frank.

"It is evident that they do not know yet that this is an air-ship," replied the captain.

"Yes. The Mexicans think it is a sort of fort we are building."

"Very well, let them continue to think so, and as they have surrounded the glade and evidently feel sure we cannot escape, suppose I go out under a flag of truce and hold further parley with them?"

"To what end?"

"I'll tell them we want time to consider their demand further. I'll talk in such a way as to lead them to think that despite our first defiance we are more than half inclined to surrender."

"And so gain time for us?"

"Yes."

"I think the captain's suggestion is a wise one," said Dr. Vaneyke.

"And I am of the same opinion," stated the young inventor.

"Then I'll have a parley with the Mexicans at once," replied Calavaras.

He tied a white handkerchief to a rifle barrel, and descending from the deck, advanced a short distance toward the Mexicans.

The latter were holding an excited consultation with the mounted man who had demanded the surrender of the air ship.

When he was within speaking distance Captain Calavaras called out in Spanish:

"We have reconsidered matters somewhat. But we want time to discuss the situation. Will you give us two hours to decide, if we shall surrender without a fight?"

The Mexicans talked away among themselves for a few moments. Then the spokesmen said:

"We will give the Americanos two hours' time, for we know they cannot fight their way through our lines. We would rather they would submit to arrest without violence."

"Good. In two hours then you shall know what we have decided on," the captain replied.

The men of the air ship were well satisfied.

Much could be done in two hours by men who were working for their lives.

"I think," cried Frank, when Captain Calavaras had regained the

deck of the air-ship, "that we can compress the work which I estimated would take about half a day, under ordinary conditions, into two hours' time. The present stress of circumstances will inspire all hands to make speed."

The way every man toiled after that was wonderful.

But when the two hours were up there was still some work to be done.

The Mexicans began to exhibit signs of uneasiness, and presently the spokesman rode out toward the air vessel.

"I must give him our decision now," said the captain.

"And yet half an hour's work remains to be done," replied Frank.

"But we can hold off an army for that time. Tell them we are not a-going to surrender!"

Captain Calavaras leaped to the rail and called out to the spokesman of the Mexicans in Spanish:

"Senor, we have decided never to surrender."

"Then you shall all be put to death. The populace are terribly enraged against you as the supposed destroyers of their homes. They will massacre you without mercy unless you surrender," cried the Mexican.

"You people have the pleasant little custom of massacring enemies after they surrender. We remember the Alamo, where your men massacred brave Davy Crockett and his little band of heroes after they had thrown down their arms. We don't trust such wolves," replied Captain Calavaras.

The Mexican dashed back to the lines of the besiegers of the electric air yacht.

In a moment the multitude, armed with guns, clubs and all sorts of weapons and implements, came surging toward the disabled aerial vessel.

It seemed cruel to fire on the mob without trying to frighten them off without loss of life first.

So Frank said to Captain Calavaras and the doctor, who were acting as gunners:

"Fire over their heads!"

Boom!

Boom!

With a tremendous detonation the reports of the two cannons rang out.

The great shells they carried went singing over the heads of the Mexican mob.

They were not trained soldiers, and the discharge of the cannon halted them all.

The more timid fled.

But a considerable number stood their ground a moment or so.

Then they, too, fell back in good order. But meanwhile, true to their treacherous nature, the Mexicans were working a cunning ruse.

While the main band advanced openly toward the air-ship, about a score of the Mexicans—all picked men—were creeping up toward the electric vessel through the tall grass from another direction.

Suddenly, with a chorus of wild, fierce yells, these men came scrambling up the sides of the electric yacht. They bounded over the rail. The deck swarmed with them.

Frank and his crew were surprised. But the inventor and all his comrades rushed into the deck house and secured the door.

The next moment, as the Mexicans on the deck were charging on the deck house from all sides, Frank turned on the electricity to the battery of twenty-four repeating rifles set in the walls of the deck house on all sides.

The volley of shots that were discharged slaughtered more than half of the Mexicans. Mingled with the detonations of the rifles came the yells of the Mexicans.

Those who survived the first terrible volley leaped from the vessel and ran for their lives.

Frank and his men came out of the deck house.

In a few moments the last thing necessary to be done before the vessel again sailed was accomplished.

When the electric air yacht's crew felt that they were saved, Frank turned on the gas from the generators to the two balloon globes. The vessel at once began to rise. It soared swiftly toward the sky, while the wonder and awe the Mexicans experienced at the sight seemed to hold them spellbound.

As soon as a proper elevation was attained the electricity was turned on to the propelling machinery, and away the wonderful yacht sailed southward.

Some days later, during which time no adventure of great importance transpired, the men of the air yacht saw a wonderful cone-shaped mountain to the southward, and Captain Calavaras cried out:

"The hidden land of the Aztecs is almost reached! Now the real perils—the awful dangers of our voyage will begin!"

CHAPTER XV.

SCOUTING IN THE ELECTRIC ROAD WAGON.

ALL on board the electric air yacht felt that there was a note of real prophecy in the thrilling words of Captain Calavaras.

The cone-shaped mountain became more and more distinctly developed as the electric yacht approached it.

Captain Calavaras turned presently to Frank Reade and said:

"Frank—beg pardon, Mr. Reade—it has occurred to me that it would be a wise precaution to keep our aerial vessel out of the sight to the last of the Aztecs who dwell beyond yonder strange mountain."

"Perhaps you are right. Indeed, at the outset it may be of great

importance that we should keep our presence upon the borders of the Aztec land a secret," replied Frank.

"Yes, until we can definitely learn the situation of my friend, the young king, and what the circumstances we have to contend against are more minutely than we are yet aware."

"Then suppose we make a landing?"

"That is precisely what I was about to suggest."

"Then it shall be done."

Frank issued the necessary orders, and the electric yacht was gradually lowered to the earth in the usual manner.

All the machinery worked well, and the process of drawing off the gas from the twin balloons was sufficiently easily accomplished by the inventor in person.

When the air ship had gently, and without shock, settled down to the earth, and there rested securely—the weight being on the spiral springs under the hull—Captain Calavaras, Frank and Dr. Vaneyke held a consultation.

Meantime, Felix Frolix, the dude reporter of "The Daily Trumpet," had got out his note book, and he was scribbling away for dear life in this wise:

"Professor Felix Frolix, representative of the Daily Trumpet, discovers a wonderful cone-shaped mountain. He volunteers to go alone to inspect the strange, natural formation. Thrilling adventures of the daring explorer about the strange mountain."

While the little dude reporter worked away with the presistency of a "space-writer" for a New York daily to spin out a column of imaginary "matter," Barney and Pomp watched him.

Finally, Felix put up his pencil and thrust the note-book into the side-pocket of his corduroy tourist's coat, while he muttered:

"That will do. I have described a desperate battle on the edge of a cliff between myself and several hundred Aztecs. Oh, my, I only wish there were some cannibals here so I could introduce some Stanley et al business. Have a slave girl about to be eaten and send Felix Frolix heroically to her rescue—on paper."

Felix sighed as he added:

"Just my dashed luck! Ba Jove, there's sure not to be any cannibals here if I want 'em!"

Barney came up and stood beside the little dude for a moment, as he said:

"If ye plaze Mister Falix, will yez be afther loanin' av an Irish gentleman a chew of the weed, wid interest."

"Sir, do I look like a tobacco chewer? Ba Jove don't-cher-know, the only form in which I indulge in the weed is the mild—very mild cigawet," replied Felix somewhat indignantly.

"Sure, an is that so, sur," said Barney turning away, as Pomp sauntered up. "Faith an I wouldn't like to cry 'there's a butt!' when he was around if I wanted to pick it up meself. These judes are all spalpeens. It's the loikes av thim would stale a free lunch in an aste side gin-mill, an' thin go round an pick the teeth of thim in front of Dilmoneyco's."

"Oh! Oh! It's gone! I'm ruined! I'm robbed. Thieves! burglars! politicians!" suddenly yelled the dude reporter.

"What's up now?" demanded Frank Reade, crossing the deck with Captain Calavaras and the doctor, as he heard Felix's outcry:

"I'm kidnapped! It's gone! It's stolen!" wailed Felix, on the verge of tears.

"What, what?" cried Frank.

"Me note-book! Me report of our great voyage, don't-cher-know, ba Jove!"

"How did you lose it?"

"Ba Jove, I think the Irish fellow must have it."

"Barney?"

"Yis, sir."

"Have you Mr. Frolix's note-book?"

"Sure, an' I haven't, sir."

"Do you know anything about it?"

"Faith, an' would yez have me tell tales out of school?"

"Do you know anything about the note-book, I say?"

"Begob, an' the nagur has it."

"Dat's a lie, Irish!" roared Pomp.

"Listen at the nagur. Sure an' it's an Irish gentleman he's talkin' to. Begob, an' it's a peaceful mon I am. But I'll bate the head av the nagur. Look masher dear! Do ye mind the book stickin' out av the pocket av the thafe av the worruld now!"

As he spoke Barney pointed at Pomp's side pocket, and lo, there, protrudidg from it all saw the little dude reporter's treasured note-book.

"Oh, joy! oh, joy! It is not lost!" cried Felix, and he made a dive for Pomp, and snatched the book out of his pocket.

The darky looked completely astounded.

"Fo' de good Lawd, Massa Frank, dis cook don't know no more dan de dead how dat book done come in dat pocket!" cried Pomp.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Barney, in delight.

"Gollie! When dat yar flannel-mouf done laugh like dat, dis chile knows he hab been playin' some trick, fo' sure. Irish done stole dat book, an' put it in my pocket, I tell yer, Mars Frank."

"Whoop! Take that, ye nagur, for callin' av a gintleman from the County Clare a liar!" yelled Barney.

He made a rush at Pomp.

But like a flash the darky ducked.

And then—well, what immediately ensued seemed to have lost interest for Barney.

He was doubled up like a jack-knife on the floor.

"Come, come! I'll put you two rascals in straight-jackets if there

is any more such work as this. Now, then, get out the electric road wagon," said Frank.

Barney picked himself up.

Tamos and Mora were called by Captain Calavaras, and they lent their services to Pomp and Barney in getting the several parts of the electric road wagon up on deck.

It was carried in the storage compartment.

Frank assisted and superintended the work of putting this invention of his together.

When it was all set up there was seen a four-wheeled vehicle with a high square box on its axles, over which there were springs.

The sides of the wagon were four feet high. There were openings

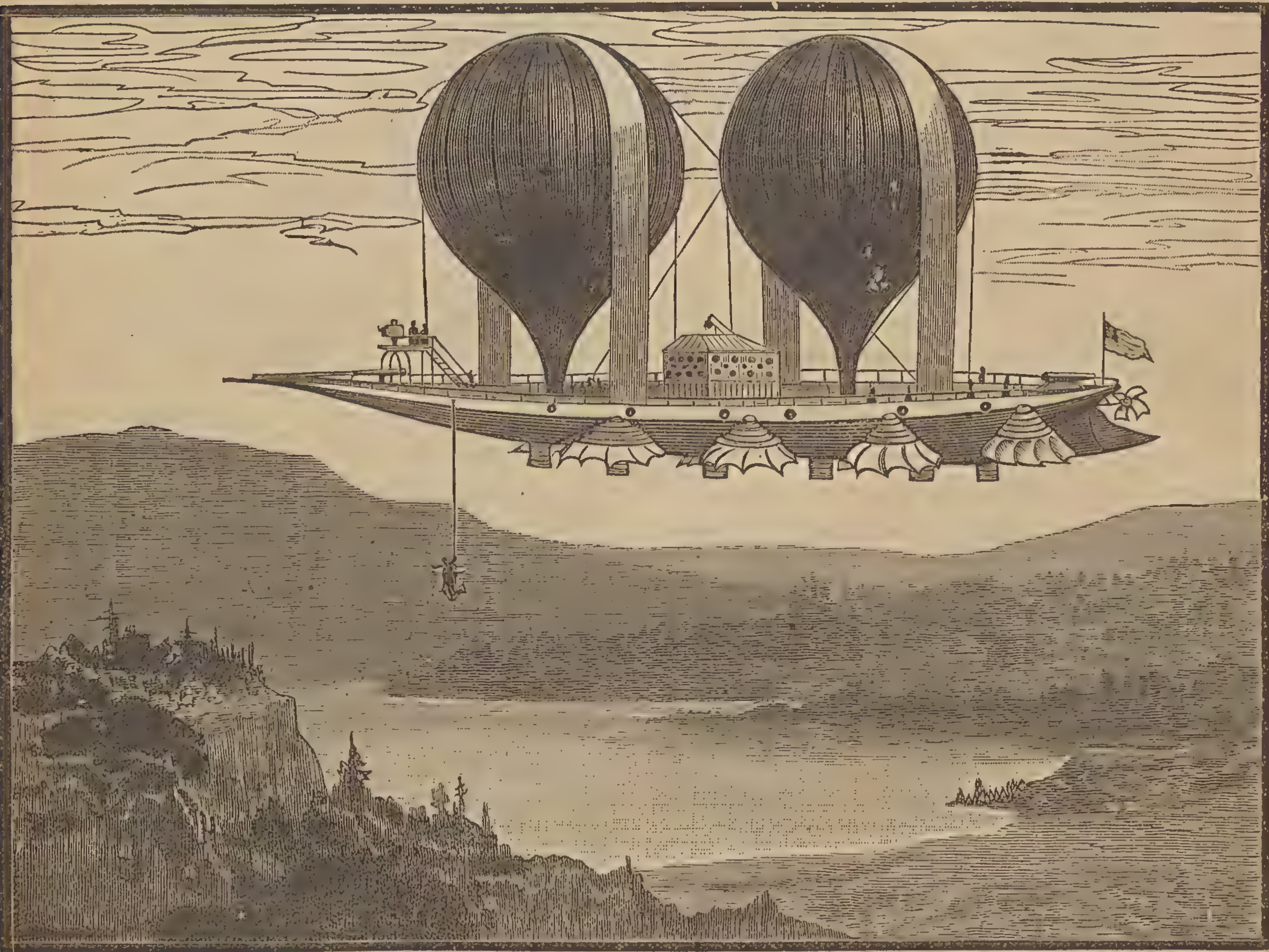
"Excuse me, ma deah boy. I'd be delighted don't cher know, but I've got a bad cold and aw, weally I must deny myself the pleasuah, ba Jove!" replied Felix.

The inventor and his comrades laughed heartily, and the next moment Frank turned the electricity on to the driving machinery of the electric road wagon, and away it sped over the plains, in the direction of the strange cone-shaped mountain, at a good rate of speed.

Ere long a broad, well-marked pathway was reached.

"The ancient Aztec road leading to the city of Mexico, which was in former days the capital of Montezuma's Empire!" cried the captain, as the pathway was discovered.

"That is the northern road leading into Aztec land," he added.



Looking over the side, Frank saw the little dude still clinging to the cable. And while he looked, he noted that Felix worked his way up until his feet rested on the anchor, while he clung to the cable.

in all sides. The material was steel, and paper reduced by hydraulic pressure to a light but strong substance.

Under the center of the box floor were the dynamos, and the driving machine occupied a space three feet square in the center of the box.

By means of two levers in the center of the box the electricity could be turned on or off to keep the vehicle going or stop it.

The wheel tires were very broad, so that in going over soft ground they would not sink much.

When the electric road wagon was all ready it was run over the side of the yacht on a decline frame.

Then Frank, Captain Calavaras and Barney and Pomp entered it.

They put on board rifles, revolvers, and ammunition. Some coils of fine wire—a black box, and some food and water, also three or four small signal balloons, about ten times as large as a toy balloon.

During their consultation Frank and his two friends, Calavaras and the doctor, had come to the decision that a scout should be made into the land of the Aztecs without showing the Air Ship.

The latter was to be held in reserve, as a surprise for the enemies of Calavaras.

When the electric road wagon was all ready to start on the perilous mission from which its occupants, as they well knew, might never return, Frank called to Felix Frolix.

"Mr. Frolix I suppose you want to go along so you can take notes of our adventures."

"Then we will follow it," said Frank.

"Yes."

On along the ancient roadway went the electric road-wagon.

At length the mountain range was reached, and there the old Aztec road led into a gloomy tunnel.

"Whist, now! What was that?" exclaimed Barney.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIGHT AT THE MOUTH OF THE TUNNEL.

THERE had flashed by the head of the jolly Irishman a feathered shaft. Glancing back, he saw an arrow buried in the trunk of a great tree, beside the Aztec road.

"Begorra, an' it must be some hathen nagurs are around. Sure an' it's the compliments av the season they hev sint us," Barney remarked.

Frank immediately turned off the electricity from the driving machine of the electric road-wagon.

Of course, the withdrawal of the motive power brought the vehicle to a standstill.

"That is an Aztec arrow!" exclaimed Captain Calavaras, eying the feathered shaft which had so nearly hit Barney.

And, while all in the electric road-wagon crouched down behind its sheltering box-sides, he added:

"The arrow was fired by a concealed foe."

"And it came from the mouth of the tunnel," said Frank.

"Yes," assented the captain.

"Some of the Aztec warriors may be concealed there."

"Probably. But the route to the land of the lost race of Mexico and Central America lays through the tunnel."

"Does the road we have been following run through it?"

"Yes."

Just then a dark shadow flitted across the mouth of the underground way, and for an instant the explorers caught the flash of a yellow light, reflected from a highly polished metal surface.

"Ha! That was a man, and he seemed to be plated with gold," cried Frank.

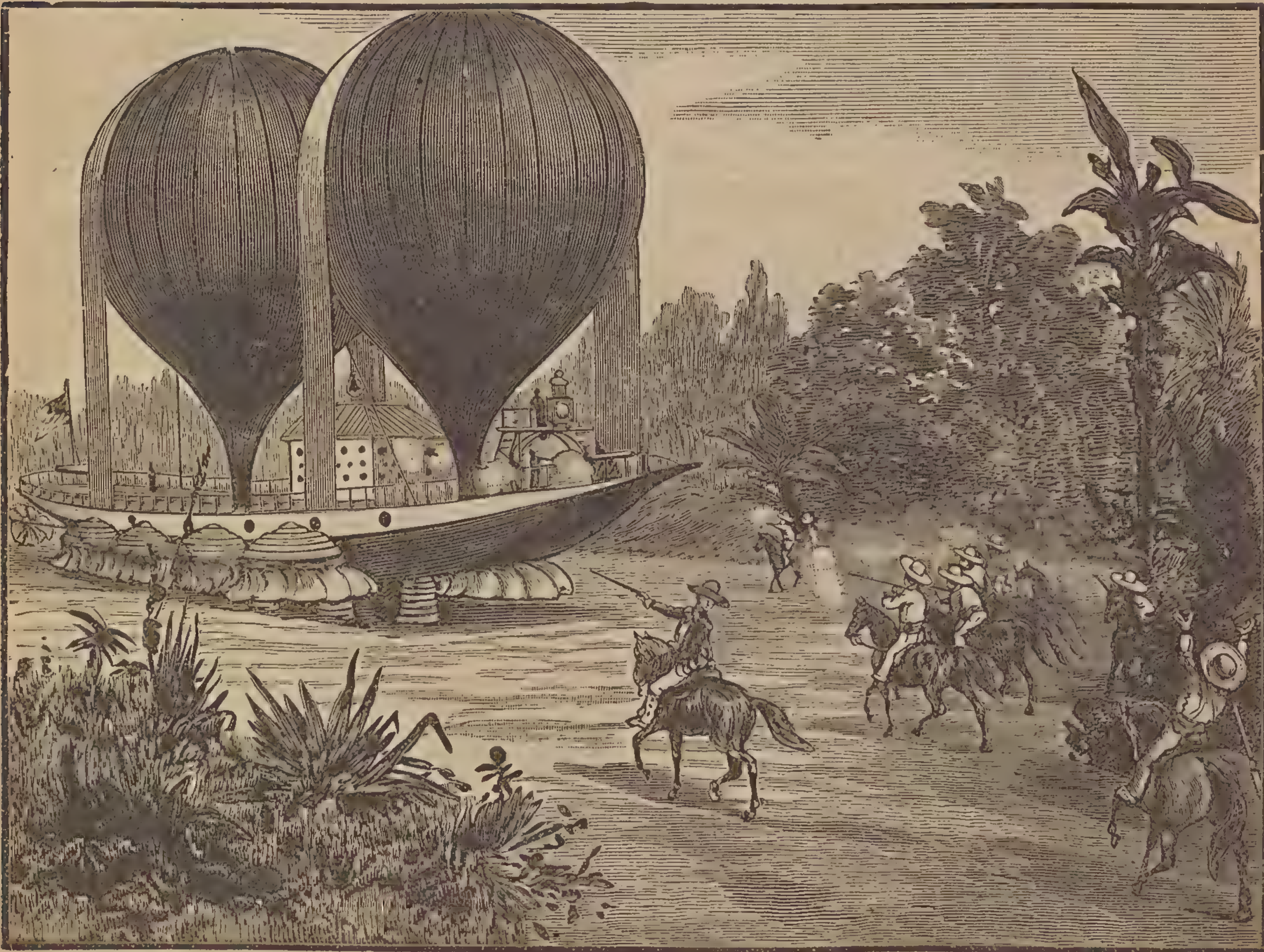
"Before you leave the wagon, you will take precautions to protect yourselves as far as possible from the deadly arrows of the Aztecs," Frank admonished.

Then he opened the black box they had brought with them from the electric air yacht, and took out two suits of mail.

They were made of woven steel, and quite impervious to arrows, as Frank knew from having duly tested them while on a previous voyage.

Barney and Pomp put the suit of mail on over their clothes, and drew the helmets which went with them over their heads.

Then, with their rifles in hand, they climbed over the rear end of the vehicle, while Frank screened their movements as best he could, as did the captain also.



In a moment the multitude, armed with guns, clubs and all sorts of weapons and implements, came surging toward the disabled aerial vessel.

"An Aztec soldier! They wear corselets of metal, plated with gold at this day just the same as did the ancient race who fought the Spaniards so bravely in the terrible days of Cortez invasion," said the captain. "And," he added, "I think the mouth of the tunnel is watched and guarded by the spies of the murderous warrior, Incati—the enemy of the young king I seek to save."

"What is to be done?" asked Frank.

"We must learn the strength of the force at the mouth of the tunnel. It may be advisable to turn back."

"Gollie! I'se de gemman dat will make a scout. See dem bushes close to de road, Mars Frank," cried Pomp.

"Yes," assented the young inventor.

"Well den, s'pose I done drop over the hind end board ob de wagon, I done reckon dat I kin git into dem bushes, an' creep up near de mouff ob dat big hole in de mountains, widout dem yeller niggers gittin' dar eyes on me."

"Be the powers av turf, an' I'll go wid yez!" said Barney. "Sure an Irishman will go where niver a nagur dare go."

"What do you think of Barney's plan, captain?" inquired Frank.

"I think well of it."

"Then you and Barney may go on the scout," said Frank, turning to the darky.

"Come on thin, nagur. Begorra, an' it's a bit av a ruction we may be afther havin' now, to get up an appetite. Faith, an' it's yez and mesel kin bate the heads av a dozen av the yeller nagurs!" said Barney.

Barney had attached to his belt the free end of a fine coil of copper wire. The coil remained in the wagon.

It was wound upon a revolving shuttle, and when Barney crept away, under cover of the bushes, with Pomp, the wire played out.

Thus at all times he had a connection with the wagon, and Frank knew the Irishman was acquainted with a set of signals, to be made by jerking the wire, which they had often used before.

Barney and Pomp had advanced until they were close to the mouth of the tunnel without seeing any one.

Then all at once a dozen strange-looking men, clad in metal corselets of burnished gold, wearing waving plumes in metal head-pieces, and armed with spears, bows-and-arrows and huge two-edged swords, with teeth like a great saw in their edge, rushed out of the tunnel.

Straight into the cover where Barney and Pomp were charged the Aztec warriors, and the Irishman and the darky heard the strange war-cries which rang in the ears of the Spanish invaders in the time of Montezuma.

"Whoop! It's a ruction' we are in for now, Pomp, me jewel!" yelled Barney.

"Gollie! I'se all yere. Fo' de Lawd sake, Barney, what kind of men am dem yeller niggers?" replied Pomp.

The two brave comrades raised their rifles to their shoulders.

The next moment the Aztec warriors discharged a volley of arrows at them.

But, although the feathered shafts struck the daring fellows, their suits of chain armor turned the arrows aside.

In awe and amazement the Aztecs witnessed this. But they were by no means ignorant. Their own metal corselets were made to protect their vital organs.

In a moment they seemed to comprehend how the men before them were shielded.

Then, brandishing their spears and their great primitive swords, with their saw-like teeth, they charged.

Evidently the warriors of the lost race of Montezuma meant to bring the fight to close quarters.

Instantly, while the Aztecs charged, Barney and Pomp opened fire with their rifles, and at the same time the Irishman gave the wire attached to his belt, that ran back to the electric road wagon, three sharp jerks.

The bullets of the brave henchmen of Frank Reade brought down two of the Aztecs.

Then the strange warriors were upon Barney and Pomp.

A terrible hand to hand battle ensued at once then.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney, clubbing his rifle and dealing tremendous blows in all directions. "Begorra, this is a foight worth livin' for. It takes me back to the good ould days av Donnybrook, in the dear land av the shamrock!" shouted Barney.

"Hil' Yi! Golly, dis am better dan a razor misunderstandin' 'twixt gemmen of Thompson street," shouted Pomp.

He acted on the motto "hit a head whenever you see it."

No thought of fear seemed to enter the minds of the two perfectly reckless and daring old parils.

A big Aztec made a sudden rush at Pomp.

"Golliel' now I done git in my fine work!" yelled the darky.

Then he ducked.

The next moment he shot forward like a battering-ram.

"Bang!" his bullet head struck the huge Aztec below the belt.

The warrior went down doubled up like a jack-knife in the middle.

Six of his comrades closed in about Pomp.

The rest surrounded Barney.

The fight became one of the most desperate those two brave heroes of a hundred battles in every land on the globe had ever been called upon to engage in.

They fought like tigers.

The Aztecs who pressed upon Barney began to strike the wire which connected him with the electric wagon. And in every instance when an Aztec touched that wire he didn't seem to like it.

The fact was he went down. He was shocked terribly.

When Barney jerked the wire Frank knew he asked him to connect it with the battery. This the inventor did.

At once a strong current was sent along the wire to Barney's belt, and thence it was communicated to every part of the chain armor he wore.

The suit of mail, however, was completely insulated from Barney's person by means of a lining composed of material that was a complete non-conductor.

"Whoop! Whoop!" yelled Barney as he saw the Aztecs tumble over when they were shocked by the wire.

Then he rushed in among them.

Every man he touched went down.

"Begorra, it's old lightning let loose I am! Begob, it's a walkin' battery I am. Come on, ye blackguards, an' git yer medicine! Whoop!" shouted Barney, dancing about.

For some moments, in his intense excitement he forgot Pomp. It seemed to him that but a moment before he had heard the voice of the darky in the bushes close beside him.

But now, as two of the five Aztecs who had come at him when the strange warriors almost equally divided their force, to assault him, and Pomp ran—Barney called in vain for Pomp.

"Begorra, is it kilt he is!" cried Barney, at length. Then he rushed out of the bushes.

He fancied he heard a faint cry for help, uttered in Pomp's voice.

Barney was just in time to see poor Pomp dragged out of sight into the tunnel by five Aztecs.

With a wild Irish yell Barney charged forward to the rescue. But he stumbled and fell.

When he scrambled to his feet he felt four quick jerks on the wire at his belt. Instantly Barney faced the electric wagon.

CHAPTER XVII.

RETREAT CUT OFF—THE TORPEDOES.

The Irishman knew Frank had signaled him to come back to the electric wagon, when he felt the four sharp jerks on the wire attached to his belt.

Barney saw at once that a great peril menaced the electric wagon, at that instant.

As he glanced toward the vehicle, upon regaining his feet, he saw a band of at least three score warriors, evidently of the same strange race as those which he had just encountered.

"Good-by, Pomp, me gossoon! Kape up a stout heart, and begorra, if the blackguards don't make way wid yer too soon, thrust mesel' an' Frank Reade ter save yez yet!" shouted Barney, for the consolation of his colored friend.

Then he darted back toward the electric wagon.

The three score Aztecs were advancing between the vehicle and the route back to the air yacht.

The retreat of Frank Reade, Jr., was cut off.

The Aztecs had suddenly come out of a dense growth of timber beside the ancient highway of their people, which Frank had just passed with the electric wagon.

It was upon discovering the large force of the Aztecs in the rear that Frank Reade had signaled Barney to return.

At this point the old road—constructed evidently with infinite labor by the race of ancient Mexico—ran through a morass.

On the other side of it, for a space of ten to thirty feet, the morass, or swamp, had been filled in, and the road-bed itself was composed of stone flags.

Frank saw that to run the electric wagon beyond the filling on either side of the road where the bushes grew in which Barney and Pomp had advanced, would be to get hopelessly stuck in the mire.

Such a calamity meant certain capture by the Aztecs.

"Since we cannot retreat without fighting our way through the strong force of Aztecs, and can neither turn to the right nor the left for any distance, we must go on, or make a stand right here," said Frank Reade when he discovered the Aztecs in the rear.

"Yes, yes," assented Captain Calavaras, while he scanned the approaching band, who came between the wagon and the electric air yacht.

"If it were not that the Aztecs are in the tunnel, we might run into it, halt just at its mouth, and there successfully stand off the Aztecs, until I can bring the air yacht up to aid us by letting go one of the signal balloons we carry," said Frank.

"We may enter the tunnel, I think. My knowledge of the Aztec's character tells me that the men who carried off poor Pomp have made on through the tunnel at full speed, to carry their prisoner to Incati, and to give the alarm in the land beyond the mountains," said Calavaras.

"What! Do you say then that the tunnel runs clear through the mountains?"

"Yes. It is the only route to the hidden land which those who travel on the earth can reach it by."

"But our yacht of the air will enable us to soar far above the natural barrier of the mighty mountain chain that shuts Aztec land out from the rest of the world."

"Yes. But quick! Let us discharge our rifles at the approaching Aztecs, and then run the wagon for the tunnel. Barney is here."

At that moment, panting with hard running, the brave Irishman reached the electric wagon.

When he had clambered into it Frank and the doctor gave the approaching Aztecs a volley of shots.

Then as the warriors of the lost race halted and seemed surprised and awed by the report of the firearms and the fall of two of the foremost of their number, the young inventor seized the levers and set the electric wagon in motion.

"Oh, worral worral! Sure and the blackguards of the worruld have got Pomp! Bad scan til the loikes av thim!" cried Barney, as soon as he got his breath.

"Yes. But we will hope that we may rescue him unharmed yet," said Frank.

Faster and faster the wheels of the electric wagon revolved.

The vehicle seemed fairly to fly over the smooth paved Aztec road.

The warriors of that strange ancient race looked on in wonder, awe and fear.

It must surely have appeared to them that the strange vehicles, containing the men with the white faces was moved by a power, beyond that of a natural agency, that witchcraft was at work.

The delay of the Aztecs in pursuing the electric road wagon was of value to the explorer and his comrades.

On, on they went.

The base of the mountain wall was reached, and before the electric wagon appeared the mouth of the great tunnel, like the entrance of the realms of eternal darkness.

The ancient highway led into it.

Frank set an electric lantern on the high dashboard of the wagon, and turned on the light.

Then into the tunnel ran the wonderful vehicle.

But just inside it, the inventor turned off the electricity from the powerful dynamo, and the machinery of the vehicle ceased to act.

The electric wagon came to a stop.

The light reflected from the lantern disclosed to the explorer that the tunnel was a wonderful achievement of engineering skill.

And great skill in masonry was shown. The tunnel's roof was a grand arch, made of square blocks of a grayish stone, all of equal size, and imbedded in a sort of mortar or cement, that through lapse of time seemed to have become as hard as adamant.

Radiating along the tunnel, the electric light disclosed a long space of the underground way.

But, as they peered forward anxiously, the occupants of the electric wagon saw no living thing in the tunnel.

It seemed that the theory Captain Calavaras had advanced regarding the probable conduct of poor Pomp's captors was correct.

They had evidently made all haste along the tunnel with their prisoner.

As soon as the electric wagon stopped, just inside the tunnel, the three comrades in it made ready to meet an attack by the Aztecs.

They leveled their rifles through loop-holes in the high rear end of the vehicle.

Soon the strange warriors came on.

Again they were met with a volley of bullets.

But they did not halt.

With a ringing cheer they came on. They were a hundred times braver than the redskins of North America.

Frank Reade comprehended this remnant of the lost race of ancient Mexico was the most valiant people—among the uncivilized—that he had ever encountered.

The repeating rifles of the men of the electric wagon did terrible execution among the Aztecs.

Frank was averse to unnecessary bloodshed. But he knew in this instance it could not be avoided.

The three comrades worked the triggers of their weapons as rapidly as possible.

And yet the brave, noble-looking Aztecs came on and on like trained soldiers facing a battery and determined to carry it by storm.

Frank suddenly threw down his rifle and leaped to the black box.

He drew forth a heavy case, opened it and disclosed a dozen or two dynamite torpedoes set in little separate compartments of the case.

"Now, then, we will all hurl these terrible missiles. Each torpedo contains as much destructive power as a score of rifle balls. Quick! quick! The rush of the Aztecs must be stayed or we are lost," cried Frank.

The war cries of the Aztecs sounded fierce and triumphant. Every moment was bringing them closer and closer.

Evidently the savage men now felt pretty sure of capturing the strangers.

But, all at once, three of Frank Reade's wonderful dynamite torpedoes were hurled among the warriors by the young inventor and his two comrades.

Three terrible explosions ensued.

Almost simultaneously the three dynamite torpedoes were discharged, by concussion, as they struck upon the land.

The deadly missiles fell among the charging Aztecs.

The result was awful.

There could not have been a more effectual medium employed to stay the desperate charge of those brave warriors.

It was as if a battery of a hundred guns had suddenly been unmasked and discharged among them.

The slaughter was amazing.

The air was filled with hundreds of death dealing missiles.

The loud, triumphant war cries of the Aztecs were changed to shouts of pain, groans, and the strange weird death wails, such as the historians tell us sounded on the battle fields of Mexico, when Cortez's soldiers cut down the Aztecs.

And the daring and determined charge of those men of Montezuma Kingdom was immediately checked.

They fell back.

The retreat was a confused flight.

Nor did they halt, until they were out of rifle range, along the ancient road.

A few moments later Frank Reade said:

"Now we will send up a signal balloon. It is time that we called the electric air yacht to our assistance. We are at so great a distance from it that Dr. Vaneyke, and the others on board it, could not possibly have heard our rifles."

"Hist! By all the fates, a large force of Aztecs are coming through the tunnel!" uttered Captain Calavaras.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FLIGHT OF THE SIGNAL BALLOONS.

CAPTAIN CALAVARAS possessed keen ears. His superiority in this respect had enabled him to detect the faint sounds of many footsteps in the tunnel, while to the hearing of Frank Reade and Barney those sounds were yet inaudible.

But presently Frank and Barney caught the same sounds.

"As I live you are right!" cried Frank.

"We are now—as one may say—between two fires," said Captain Calavaras.

"Yes. And the peril of our situation is increased a thousand fold."

"It is."

"Not an instant must be lost. Help me into the signal balloon!" cried Frank.

He brought out of the box a red balloon, about three feet in diameter.

Assisted by the captain, Frank quickly inflated the red balloon.

To do this he employed a small receiver, full of condensed gas.

When the balloon was expanded, Frank, holding it by a stay-cord, leaped out of the wagon and passed beyond the mouth of the tunnel.

Then he set the signal balloon free.

He had instructed the doctor to keep watch on board the electric yacht for a signal.

The old scientist had promised to maintain a constant and close watch through a powerful telescope, in the direction taken by the electric wagon.

Though the distance at which the small, red balloon was sent up was remote from the air yacht, yet as the day was bright and clear, Frank Reade did not doubt that the doctor, if on the alert with his telescope, would discover it.

As soon as Frank set the balloon free, it soared upward.

He watched it with keen anxiety.

"To think that all our lives depend upon that little globe of red. Ah, if the electric air yacht does not come before we are attacked from both the front and the rear, we shall ultimately be slain or captured," said Frank.

A moment later, to his horror, he saw the little red balloon carried by a current of air from the upper altitudes downward.

It was passing over the heads of the Aztecs who had retreated. Like one who watches a messenger of life and death, Frank Reade kept his eyes fixed upon the signal balloon.

Near the Aztecs the powerful downward current carried it. The strange warriors saw it.

There was a moment of intense and terrible suspense for Frank and his two comrades, for the latter had now joined him outside of the tunnel.

They saw the Aztecs raise their bows and take aim at the red balloon.

Was it within range of their arrows?

Frank could not tell.

But he hoped and prayed it was not. The bow-strings of the Aztecs twanged, the feathered shafts sped upward.

"Horror, horror!" cried Frank. "The signal balloon is hit!"

It was so.

A groan burst from the lips of Captain Calavaras as the red globe collapsed in mid-air and then fell among the Aztecs.

"Quick, for your lives! Another balloon must be sent up on the instant!" cried Frank.

He rushed back to the electric wagon.

The others followed.

In a moment he took another red balloon from the supply box. As before, Captain Calavaras assisted him, and the second balloon was inflated in a trice.

But nearer and nearer sounded the tramp, tramp of the warriors who were coming through the tunnel.

Frank shuddered as he heard their footsteps more and more distinctly.

But he was out of the electric wagon the instant the second signal balloon was inflated.

Rushing forth from the tunnel, he set the balloon free.

It soared upward.

Again Frank and his friends experienced the most thrilling suspense.

But this time fate was not cruel.

The signal balloon soared skyward grandly.

High up against the sky it went, far over the heads of the Aztecs, and then a gentle wind carried it northward.

"Bravo! There is hope for us yet!" cried Frank.

"Begorra, an' it's right ye are! Faith, an' the air yacht kin make a lightnin' run to the tunnel," said Barney.

"Right you are, Barney. The wonderful air yacht has a speed of a hundred miles to the hour, without putting on all the current. She can run from where we left her to the tunnel in fifteen minutes, and not make an extraordinary effort. I estimate we are twenty-five or thirty miles from where we left the yacht," said Frank.

The red balloon passed out of sight to the north.

Then the adventurers went into the tunnel.

"Strange that the men we heard coming through the underground way have not arrived yet," said Frank, presently.

"It must, indeed, seem so to you. But not so to me," said the captain.

"How is that?"

"When I was among the Aztecs I frequently traversed the tunnel, and discovered that it possessed wonderful acoustic properties, the secret of producing which has died with the men who built the tunnel. Sounds made in it are carried miles. Voices that sound near in it are a long distance off. You can comprehend the value to the Aztecs of the acoustic properties of this tunnel. It enables them to hear the approach of an enemy through it while he is yet at a long distance."

"Then the men we hear, seemingly so near, are really at a considerable distance?"

"Yes."

"How long think you, Captain, before they will arrive here?"

Calavaras listened for a instant.

Then he said:

"I should judge we would have from seven to ten minutes respite."

"Then we will fix things to stay the advance of the Aztecs beyond a certain point."

"How so?"

"You shall see."

Frank hastily made the copper wire fast to the electric key of the dynamo. Then he and Barney carried out the coil to a point along the tunnel. Frank had paced the distance from the electric wagon.

As he paused, he said:

"We are now just out of rifle range, and more than that distance beyond arrow range from the yacht. Here we will stretch our wire."

"Begob, an' it's a great head yez have av yer own, masher dear," cried Barney in admiration, as Frank strung a net-work of the wire across the tunnel, making fast the strands by means of steel staples with insulators, which he drove in the cement between the stones of the wall without great difficulty, because they were almost needle-pointed.

Six strands of the copper wire Frank stretched across the tunnel from wall to wall.

Then he went back to the wagon with Barney.

"Well done! I see what you mean to do. Ah, you have set up a wonderful electric barricade between us and our foes!" said Captain Calavaras.

"Yes, and now the powerful current from the dynamos are traversing the wires."

"Whoop! Be the shamrock so green an' it's a bit av diversion we'll be having when the yellow nagures try to get through the wires. But faith, an' it's meself as would rather a ruction wid them and a chance to bate the heads av the blackguards. Worr! worra! Sorry is the day. What will I do at all, at all, if the spalpeens kill Pomp? Sure an' it's a heart broken mon I'd be widout the nagur. Sure an' it's sorry I am I iver played a mane trick on him. It's a clane white heart Pomp had av his own under a black skin, begob," muttered Barney.

Soon the Aztecs appeared in the interior of the tunnel.

The vanguard of the strange warriors bore flaming torches.

The light revealed a long line of gold bedecked soldiers, marching three abreast like trained men of a civilized army.

Frank and his comrades could not see the end of the column.

The inventor crept out of the tunnel, and looked up into the cloudless sky. Then a shout of joy went up from him.

Afar, to the north, he saw a gracefully sailing object, up in the blue vault, far above the earth.

At one glance Frank recognized his wonderful air yacht.

"Another balloon! Quick! Quick!" fairly shouted Frank.

And he was back in the electric road wagon almost as he spoke. Barney sprang to his assistance.

They inflated another red balloon, and Frank sent it up at the mouth of the tunnel.

The balloon made a successful ascension.

The report of a cannon sounded from mid-air.

One of the great guns on board the aerial vessel had been fired. Frank knew that was a signal to tell him he was discovered.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAND OF THE AZTECS.

But the Aztecs in the tunnel were now almost upon the electric barricade.

They came on with wild battle cries as they saw the electric wagon.

The fine wires were stretched about three feet from the floor.

Evidently the Aztecs did not discover them until the foremost warriors ran fully upon them. Then they received terrible shocks.

Uttering screams of terror and agony, the Aztecs who touched the wires fell.

Others tried to leap the first wire without seeing the other five strands at about three feet apart.

Those daring warriors were caught in the network and shocked to death.

Absolute terror soon seized upon the Aztecs.

They had encountered a mysterious source of death.

They were unable, evidently, to form any theory to account for the fatal character of those seemingly harmless little wires.

The Aztecs recoiled.

Frank Reade's electric barricade held the tunnel against the advances of the Aztecs, as a hundred men could not have done.

But now the band without the tunnel had regained their courage, for they had heard the yells of the warriors of their own race emanating from within the tunnel, and were evidently confident that reinforcements were at hand.

In their complete ignorance of what was transpiring within the tunnel the Aztecs on the outside of it came on once more at a charge.

As soon as they were near enough to make the feathered shafts penetrate the mouth of the tunnel, they sent a volley at the electric road wagon.

Frank and his comrades returned the fire.

But now the Electric Air Yacht still undiscovered by the Aztecs was making a descent.

It came to rest on the ancient road, a few hundred yards in the rear of the advancing Aztecs.

Frank saw the aerial vessel land.

"Now, then, to cut loose from the wire and make a run for the air yacht!" cried the young inventor, joyfully.

He disconnected the wire from the dynamo, turned on the currents to the driving machinery of the remarkable vehicle, and at once sent it at lightning speed running out of the tunnel.

Then the Aztecs in the under-mountain passage gained courage to advance. They found the mysterious wires were now harmless.

They rushed after the flying electric road vehicle. Out of the tunnel poured a multitude of the warriors of the old race of Mexico.

And right down at the small band on the ancient road between him and the air yacht, the haven of safety which he meant now to reach at all hazards, Frank sent the electric road wagon.

The vehicle advanced at racing speed, and crashed in among the band of strange warriors.

They tried to stay it. But in vain.

Beyond the place where the air yacht had landed, the warriors of the hidden land, beyond the great mountains, had placed rocks and obstructions of all sorts across the road, so it would not have been possible for the electric road wagon to proceed far.

It went through the ranks of the enemy.

Then on to the air yacht.

Dr. Vaneyke and the others on board the wonderful aerial ship greeted the return of Frank and his comrades with a ringing cheer.

But the immediate danger was not yet over.

The Aztecs from the tunnel, to the number of hundreds, had united

with the band that had cut off the retreat of Frank, outside the passage, for a time.

They were all coming on now, clearly bent upon attacking the airship, which they had now discovered, of course. It was apparent that they were awed, mystified, and astonished at the sight of the air vessel. But none of them had seen it descend from the clouds, it may be presumed, from what ensued.

Rushing fearlessly into the swamp, a large party of the Aztecs got in the rear of the vessel of the air.

It was clear the men of Montezuma's race meant to surround it, and that they thought it was a vehicle like the road wagon in character—made to move on land in a way they could not explain.

Frank made haste, assisted by his men, to get the electric vehicle in which he had made his perilous scouting expedition on board the yacht.

Then the cannons in the stern and in the bow were depressed and fired at the Aztecs, who were now warily closing in upon the yacht from all sides.

The effect was magical.

The Aztecs fled, then rallied, and stood, in wonder chained, staring at the strange objects on board the wonderful aerial vessel, from whence the voice of the thunder came and the rain of death.

Frank hastily inflated the twin reservoirs of the yacht with the condensed gas from the generator and the vessel left the earth.

The Aztecs' wonder, fear and awe, became more evident than ever, then.

They gesticulated wildly.

Some threw themselves upon the ground.

Others fled into the great tunnel.

The electric yacht soon reached a high elevation.

Then the currents from the powerful dynamos were, as usual, employed to set the propellers in motion.

Barney took the helm and the course of the air vessel was given by Frank.

"Steer over the mountain range. We will delay no longer. Pomp must be saved if we can accomplish his rescue with the aid of the airship," said the young inventor.

While Frank recounted the adventures through which he and his comrades of the electric road wagon had just passed, the yacht sailed on.

The mountain scenery below the aerial vessel was grand beyond anything Frank Reade had ever seen, though he had been a world wide traveler.

The range was finally passed.

Beyond it was a country, the like of which no man would have expected to find there. It was a land of green and fertile plains, valleys, woodland and open, watered by silvery streams.

A land possessing all the beauties and desirable qualities of an earthly Eden.

Through a field-glass Frank scanned the hidden country of the last of the Aztecs in interest and wonder.

He saw that well-made, paved roads abounded—that the fields were well tilled—that there was fruit in abundance, gardens of rare beauty, and hamlets were scattered all about a central town, in the center of which towered aloft what seemed to be a great shaft of gold—that glittered in the sun's rays and reflected a brilliant golden light—that dazzled the eyes of the explorers.

"Yonder, where you see the great tower of gold, is the chief village of Aztec land. There I have no doubt Incati—the villainous cacique, who has made the young king a captive and taken his throne, has made his quarters. There too, Pomp will be taken," said Captain Calavaras, when the wonderful land of the Aztecs came in sight, as the air ship passed over the lofty mountain range.

"Put her head for the tower of the golden shaft," ordered Frank.

"Faith an' I will, sur," replied Barney at the helm.

The yacht sailed gracefully on, until it hung over the ancient town of the Aztecs. Then the men on the aerial craft obtained a good view of the wonderful place.

The houses were made of adobe—sun-dried brick. The streets were broad and neatly paved and very clean. Everywhere there was a lavish display of gold.

The precious metal was particularly prominent in the ornamentation of a great palace in the center of the village.

This structure was not unlike the ruined palaces and temples archaeologists have discovered in Yucatan.

The palace was of stone and adobe.

It was built in terraces, and each story sloped at the top.

Its steeple was the golden shaft the men of the electric yacht had seen a long way off.

Many people were seen on the streets of the wonderful town.

They were clothed in tunics, of some whitish material, and wore head dresses. Soldiers were stationed about the palace.

There was some excitement about it, as was evident from the assembled crowd there. All at once Captain Calavaras uttered an exclamation.

"What is it?" cried Frank.

"See yonder file of soldiers, who have just issued forth from the dark, forbidding-looking building?" replied the captain.

"Yes, I see them. And, as I live, among them marches a slender, boyish figure, chained hand and foot."

"That boy is the young king. He has just been brought out of the prison behind the palace," continued Calavaras.

"They are taking him to the palace."

"Yes, and according to the custom of the Aztecs, who hold all their

trials of prisoners in the great audience room of the palace, I think the young king is being conducted there to be tried on some charge trumped up by the villain Incati, to give him an excuse for putting the noble boy to death," continued Captain Calavaras.

The next moment the great door of the palace was seen to open, and four men appeared within it. Captain Calavaras turned absolutely white as he saw them.

"Haskell and his Mexican cut-throats, and Incati! My deadly foes are here!" he uttered.

CHAPTER XX.

FACE TO FACE WITH OLD FOES—HASKELL'S DEFIANCE.

CAPTAIN CALAVARAS had recognized the three men who were evidently leagued with Incati, the Aztec usurper who had stolen the throne of his people from the young king.

The inventor started, for at that moment he fully realized that the presence of civilized men who were their enemies would render the task they had determined to accomplish even more difficult than it would otherwise have been.

And Frank saw that since the white villains must have set out for the land of the Aztecs immediately after their unsuccessful attempt to blow up the electric yacht, they had time to reach the hidden country ahead of himself.

He had been three days in getting ready to sail after their departure. He had lost three days more at the Mexican town where he and his comrades so narrowly escaped being thrown into prison. And the actual journey had consumed time too.

Altogether then it was likely that Haskell and his Mexican comrades had gained over a week's time on Frank and his yacht of the air in making the journey.

Of course Haskell, being familiar with the route by which he had come from the land of the ancient race, had experienced no difficulty in guiding his comrades to it.

"Those infamous rascals will thoroughly post the Aztecs about us. We cannot hope to work on the superstitious fears of the strange people as we might have done, but for Haskell's presence," continued the captain.

"Certainly not. Haskell will tell the false King Incati and his subjects that we are merely mortals like himself and his people," acquiesced the young inventor.

"And I presume the crafty white villain will seek to belittle our powers in the views of the Aztecs, and make them think they can defeat and kill, or capture us," added the doctor.

"Yes, yes; I foresee there is to be desperate and thrilling work here," said Calavaras.

"But look! As I live, we are discovered!" cried Frank.

It was so.

All on board the air yacht saw that the men at the palace door, whom they had the most cause to fear, were pointing at them.

Then the Aztecs looked up. There was great excitement among them. Men darted through all the streets, spreading the news of the wonder that had appeared in the sky.

Forth from their dwellings thronged the populace. Men, women, and children filled the streets, and every eye was turned upon the electric air yacht.

There was visible—in the manner and conduct of the people of the hidden land—the evidences of awe and fear.

They began to make their way as by a common impulse toward the great palace.

"Ah, ha Jove! This is something to make a four column special article of," exclaimed Felix Frolix, and forthwith the little dude reporter of the Daily Trumpet got out his note-book, and began to scribble away as fast as he could, somewhat as follows:

"Professor Felix Frolix discovers an ancient Aztec city. Description of the strange place. The manners and customs of the people. A wonderful palace, etc., etc."

Meanwhile, standing on the steps of the palace through which the young king was marched into the edifice by his guards, Haskell was seen to address the multitude.

From the way in which the arch villain pointed from time to time at the air vessel, it was clear to all on board the aerial craft that he was talking about it.

Haskell and his two Mexican comrades were armed with rifles and revolvers.

Presently the cunning villain gave an exhibition of the use of these fire-arms, and seemed to explain all about them.

Clearly they meant the Aztecs should be warned in advance against the fire-arms carried by the men of the air yacht.

While the yacht cruised about over the town, the populace finally dispersed. But bands of the native soldiers were seen marching to the confines of the town, which was surrounded by a high stone wall with a walk on its parapet.

The soldiers spread themselves along the wall, as if to guard the town from an attack.

"Worra! worra! sure, an' it's nothin' at all do I see av Pomp. Maybe the yellow blackguards have killed the poor gossoon widout bringin' him here!" wailed Barney.

"I think not," said Calavaras. "You must remember that we have come at great speed from the mouth of the tunnel beyond the mountains. In my judgment Pomp's captors have not yet had time to reach the capital of the land of the Aztecs with the unfortunate fellow."

"Thin there is still hope, I may see me old pard wance more. The saints protect him," said Barney.

"Now, then, captain," remarked Frank. "What is the first thing to be done?"

"This! I will write a communication to Haskell demanding that the young king be surrendered to us unharmed. That he be brought beyond the walls of the town, and there left for us to descend and pick him up. If they refuse to do this I will tell them in my letter that we will shell the town with our cannon."

"An excellent plan," cried Frank.

The captain went to his cabin and hastily wrote the proposed note.

Then the electric yacht cruised back over the king's palace again.

Haskell, and his Mexican confederates, and Incati were still on the watch before the palace.

Captain Calavaras' message was placed in a small wooden box and attached to a coil of twine, several thousand feet in length, was lowered down in front of the palace.

On the box was placed a slip of paper, bearing the following notice:

"IN THE BOX IS A LETTER."

At first Haskell and his men seemed to fear a trap. They walked all around the box, and looked at it suspiciously.

But finally the chief villain mustered up courage sufficient to open it. He took out Captain Calavaras' letter and read it.

Having done so he seemed to acquaint the false king and the Mexicans with the contents of the letter.

Then he scrawled an answer, in a few words, and put it in the box which was then drawn up to the air yacht.

Captain Calavaras read Haskell's answer to his note.

It ran thus:

"We defy you!"

Only three words, but enough to convince the men of the air-yacht that Haskell meant to checkmate any attempt of theirs to save the young king.

"By heavens!" cried Frank Reade, when he heard Haskell's message read. "We will teach them that we are not to be defied."

"Good! Shell the town!" cried Captain Calavaras.

"Whoop! That's the talk! Begob an' it's a bit av a ruction the big gun will make wid the yell av nagurs!" cried Barney.

The cannons were promptly trained on the town, and in a few moments they were discharged. The detonation brought the people out of their houses again. Haskell and his Mexicans, accompanied by Incati, fled into the palace.

Two shells fell before it, and exploded wrecking a small building at the edge of an open square in front of the palace.

"Load again!" shouted Frank.

But before the great gun could again be discharged, a dozen guards marched the young king, still in chains, out of the palace.

"Ah, they have changed their minds about giving him up, I think!" said Dr. Vaneyke.

"Do not be too sure of that!" replied Captain Calavaras.

Even as he spoke, out of the palace came the villain, Haskell, followed by the two Mexicans and Incati.

Haskell snatched a great sword from the hands of the native guard and menaced the young king with it, and, by means of expressive pantomime, conveyed to the men of the air ship the information that the young king would immediately be put to death in case they fired upon the town again.

"Checkmated! That infernal scoundrel will really slay the young king before our eyes in case we do not draw off!" said Captain Calavaras.

There was no doubt of this in the minds of any of the men of the air yacht. They were confronted by a dilemma.

The guns were not discharged again then.

Instead, the yacht cruised away a short distance.

Suddenly Barney uttered a shout.

"Pompl Pompl Begob, an' there the gossoon is at last," he said, pointing.

Looking in the direction he indicated, Frank and the others saw a band of Aztecs bringing Pomp into the town by the way of the road leading from the tunnel in the mountains.

The next moment Pomp was marched through the great gate in the wall, and then on in the direction of the palace. Instantly Frank Reade resolved upon the most daring project of all his life.

CHAPTER XXI.

TO THE RESCUE—A TERRIBLE STRUGGLE IN THE AZTEC CITY.

ALL hands were on deck, and Frank exclaimed:

"The brave darcy who has stood by me in many an hour of deadly peril shall not go to his doom without a blow being struck for his deliverance!"

"What would you do, Frank?" asked Dr. Vaneyke, and Barney cried:

"Whoop! It's meself that is wid ye, masther dear, on that line. Faith, an' we'll have one grand ruction wid the yellow nagures for old Pomp's sake, begob!"

"My plan is this," rejoined the young inventor. "We will swoop down with the electric air yacht—right down into the street of the town which Pomp's captors are traversing, head them off from the palace and the gloomy prison beyond it, and make a fight to the death to save Pomp."

A shout that testified their approval of this heroic project went up from the brave comrades of the great inventor.

The course of the air yacht was changed until it hung over the street along which the unfortunate Pomp was being marched.

When the yacht was a considerable distance from the great palace and the prison between the latter buildings and Pomp and his guards, while Frank personally worked the valves and stopcocks by means of which the gas was drawn out of the suspensory reservoirs, all hands sprang to arms.

As Frank let the gas escape from the twin balloons and so caused the wonderful aerial vessel to descend earthward, the helmsman steered so that the yacht descended in the broad street which was the route to the palace.

In this instance Frank allowed the gas to escape from the suspensory globes with great rapidity, and the yacht shot downward at dangerous speed.

The inventor had observed that Pomp's captors had quickened their pace. He did not mean that their speed should enable them to baffle his plan.

As the yacht alighted in the center of the broad paved street there was a considerable shock, despite the elasticity of the springs under the hull, owing to the force of the contact.

Pomp's guards consisted of a score of the gold-bedecked soldiers, whom the explorers had encountered at the great mountain tunnel.

The rest of the force, there met by Frank Reade and his comrades, had not yet reached the city.

The explanation was this: The men who had captured the darky, and hurried him away through the tunnel, had met the large force. Having told of the approach of the whites, they had gone on with Pomp, receiving an accession to their company from the band they had met, while the main portion of that brigade continued on through the tunnel, to meet the explorers.

When the electric air yacht struck the street Pomp and his captors were close by, and still rapidly advancing.

But in the direction whence the Aztecs were coming with Pomp, the street made a sharp turn. The Aztecs were around the corner, and, therefore out of sight of the aerial vessel when it alighted on the street.

Instantly Frank gave orders and leaped from the deck. His men followed. The street was clear. The populace had retreated into their houses in evident terror at that point.

Frank and all hands except Felix Frolix rushed to the corner, around which they expected the Aztecs would come with Pomp in a moment or so.

The little dude reporter of "The Daily Trumpet" remained on the yacht.

"The pen is mightier than the sword," and so I'll stay here, ba Jove! and wield the pen," muttered Felix heroically, and forthwith he began to scribble in his note-book as follows:

"The electric air yacht descends upon the Aztec city to rescue one of the explorer's party—desperate charge on the enemy by Felix Frolix, etc., etc."

Frank and his men meantime stationed themselves at the corner.

Every man leveled his rifle.

Then ensued a brief period of waiting, fraught with the most intense suspense for the daring Americans.

But soon around the street corner came the Aztec soldiers with Pomp among them.

"Charge!" shouted Frank Reade.

With a tremendous cheer the little band discharged their rifles at the Aztecs and dashed forward.

The Aztecs were completely surprised. Though they had seen the electric air yacht in the air, so suddenly had it descended, and so abruptly had the attack of the Americans been made, that the strange warriors had received no warning of their close proximity.

The volley of rifle bullets scattered them for a moment, and several of their number fell, stricken by the deadly bullets of the Americans.

Right into the band charged Frank and his men. They clubbed their weapons, and Captain Calavaras and his two devoted servants drew their terrible swords and laid about them lustily.

The Aztec guards were hurled aside.

The Americans reached Pomp.

Just at that supreme moment, seeing that the captive was likely to be rescued, a giant Aztec warrior raised his spear to thrust it through the body of Pomp, whose hands were bound behind his back.

Pomp leaped backward.

Still it seemed he was doomed, as the Aztec who meant to slay him, advanced.

"Whoop! Whoop!" yelled Barney, and with a tremendous leap, the brave Irishman threw himself right between the imperiled darky and his savage foe.

With a powerful blow of his rifle, Barney struck up the Aztec's spear, as it was going straight toward the heart of Pomp.

Then, before the warrior could draw a second breath or defend himself, the clubbed weapon of the Irishman crashed down upon his skull.

The Aztec fell like a log.

"Whoop! Ireland for ever!" shouted Barney, and Frank Reade, upon the instant got close to Pomp and severed the cords that confined his arms behind his back and thrust a revolver into the grasp of the rescued darky.

"Bress de good lawd!" shouted Pomp, and as half a dozen Aztecs, who had rallied close in about him and Frank, seeking to separate them from their comrades, Pomp blazed away at them with the revolver.

But all at once the weapon refused to serve him. A cartridge had worked too far forward in the cylinder, and it would not revolve.

For an instant death was near Frank and the darky. They were hemmed in by foes. But Pomp let out a yell, then "ducked," and began to butt right and left.

Four Aztecs went down almost before they knew what hit them.

Then, with a rush, Captain Calavaras and the rest reached Frank and Pomp.

But now all the guards who had escorted Pomp had rallied.

And the people came thronging out of the houses on both sides of the street.

The men joined the guards.

They were armed, and it seemed that the explorers were in imminent danger of being cut off from the air yacht.

In a moment a great gong that was evidently at the palace, began to sound an alarm.

"Charge for the yacht," yelled Frank.

Then shoulder to shoulder, discharging their repeating rifles as they went, the Americans began a desperate and determined retreat.

But they saw, to their horror, that from the opposite side of the yacht, coming from the direction of the palace, a strong force was advancing in great haste for the aerial vessel.

"Heavens! They mean to take possession of the yacht before we can reach it!" cried Frank, indicating the force last mentioned.

"And there is only Felix Frolix left on board to defend it. The reporter is a coward. We must reach the yacht before the palace troops get there, or they will capture it," cried Captain Calavaras.

But the Americans had to fight their way. They had never encountered braver foes than the Aztecs now proved to be.

Evidently the assurances which Frank and his friends supposed the villainous Haskell had made the Aztecs regarding their ability to defeat the Americans if they only fought bravely had its effect.

But the great advantage the possession of firearms gave the Americans, almost offset the superiority of their foes in point of numbers.

Still the conflict was a terrible one, and for a brief space, while the Americans gained in their advance toward the yacht, the issue of the battle remained in doubt.

Presently, when they were very near the goal for which they were striving so heroically, the Aztecs from the palace came up close to the air yacht.

Frank looked ahead, and vainly scanned the deck of his imperiled vessel for Felix Frolix.

But Felix had disappeared.

"The arch coward! He has hidden himself at the approach of the Aztecs from the palace, I think," cried Frank, in tones of disgust and rage.

"If he has done so he deserves the terrible fate which the capture of the yacht by the enemy will surely bring upon him and all of us," said Dr. Vaneyke.

But there was no time for talk.

Every man of the frightfully imperiled party had to fight as he had never done before.

Shoulder to shoulder the heroes of Frank Reade's band pressed on.

Pomp and Barney now fought side by side, and it goes without saying that they discharged their duty like the brave spirits they always were.

The yacht was almost reached, when, with a final charge, the Aztecs from the palace made a rush at it, with the evident determination of boarding the aerial vessel.

"The yacht is lost!" cried Captain Calavaras.

"We are doomed!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, despairingly.

"But we will die fighting!" gritted Frank Reade desperately.

CHAPTER XXII.

A HERO BY ACCIDENT—TAMOS MAKES A SUGGESTION.

It was a moment laden with destiny for the explorers. Fate held the issue in her hand. Had the fiat of doom really been decreed to Frank Reade, jr. and his band of heroes?

The awful intensity, the magnitude of the peril, can scarcely be conveyed to the imagination by any descriptive power.

To think of what the future held for them in the event of the capture of their only means of escape—the air yacht—was of itself an agony of torture for the imperiled men.

But what was that?

All at once the tremendous crash of a volley of rifles, simultaneously discharged, rent the air, and from the numerous port holes in the deck-house of the electric yacht, there issued clouds of powder smoke.

With wild, terrified yells the charging Aztecs from the great palace recoiled, rolled back by an awful wave of death—by a terrible volley of bullets.

A cheer that echoed and re-echoed through the streets of the Aztec town rang out from the explorers.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Felix Frolix has discharged the electric battery of rifles in the deck-house just in time!" shouted Frank.

Clearly it was so.

And while Frank spoke the twenty-four repeating rifles in the deck-house crashed again, adding to the death list of the troops from the palace.

Then, inspired by hope which seemed to bestow upon them new power and courage, Frank and his men with one desperate charge swept the last of their foes from before them.

The electric air yacht was reached.

Upon the deck the party scrambled, and as they reached it, Frank

ran by the open door of the deck-house on his way to the machine with which the gas from the generator was conveyed to the suspensory reservoirs.

Looking into the deck-house, great as was still the danger, Frank had to burst into a hearty laugh at what he saw.

There, in the deck-house, Felix Frolix lay on the floor. The little dude was flat on his back, and in each hand he clutched one of the electric levers, by means of which the rifle battery was discharged.

"Oh, my! Oh, my! The Aztecs will kill me! The world will never know what it has lost! I heard something go off when I stumbled in here, and ran into these wires I've grasped. I wonder what exploded!" Felix Frolix was saying this to himself.

"An accidental hero!" exclaimed Frank, and he comprehended that, by the merest chance, Felix had discharged the battery.

Frank gained the gas machinery.

Instantly he turned the contents of the generator into the tubes communicating with the twin balloons.

The desired result was then at once attained. The balloons were rapidly inflated, and the wonderful vessel began to rise.

Just then the Aztecs charged.

But Captain Calavaras and the others had sprang to the cannon as soon as they gained the deck, and they discharged the great guns.

The bombardment practically ended the battle for the rescue of Pomp.

Though many arrows were discharged by the fleeing Aztecs at the electric yacht, no damage was done.

Gradually the yacht ascended into the air, and it soared higher and higher, until it was several hundred feet above the scene of recent deadly strife.

"Hurrah for Frolix! Begob he saved the yacht by firing the battery at rifles in the deck house!" cried Barney, as the vessel soared aloft.

The little dude reporter still lay on his back on the floor in the deck house, but he had let go of the electric levers.

Hearing what Barney said, Felix scrambled up and came strutting out of the deck house, with an air of supreme importance.

"Ba Jove, ma deah fellows, don't-cher-know, I weally flattah meself that, as a wear guard, I am a success. Awa, I let the enemy—wude fellahs—come so neah that I was suah every shot would tell. It was my plan not to throw away a single bullet, don't-cher-know," said Felix.

Everybody congratulated the little dude.

And he was so happy that Frank hadn't the heart to give him away. After all, though it was by accident that Felix had saved the yacht, Frank let him have all the glory he could get out of it.

Felix produced his note-book and wrote the following heading:

"Wonderful and heroic achievement of the daring reporter, Prof. Felix Frolix—He holds the electric yacht single-handed against an Aztec army, and puts them to flight."

Pomp was questioned about his experiences among the Aztecs when the electric yacht had reached a safe elevation.

"Dem yeller niggers done knocked me on de head from behind in de bush before de tunnel, an' de fust thing I knowed I didn't know nuffin. De second thing I knowed I wuz a gonner. Dem niggers was a hustlin' ob me along for keeps. S'pecks da would hab done fo' me suah, if you uns habent come down in de yacht," Pomp explained.

"Begob, an' it's ashamed av yez I am, nagur!" said Barney.

"What fo'?"

"Becase ye stood still an' let the blackguards av the worruld knock yez out."

"Deed I couldn't help that."

"Faith, an' the spalpeen wouldn't have served an Irishman that way."

"Yes, sah; I done reckon da would."

"Don't yer contradict an Irish gentleman, nagur."

"I ain't doin' dat."

"You're a liar."

"I don't want a row, Irish, but I don't 'low no flannel mouff sher to call me names."

"Begob, an' I'm a man av peace, but no nagur kin tread on the tail av me coat."

"You'd better take a rest."

"Begob, an' it's bound ye are to pick a ruction."

"No, sah."

"Begob, that's enough! That manes fight! Yez call a County Clair gentleman a liar."

"I didn't say you was a liar, sah! Dare no use in tellin' folks what da all knows!"

"Begob, I'll bate the head av yez!"

Barney put up his hands and struck at Pomp.

The darky dodged and Barney came at him again. Then Pomp began to duck. The chances were that the Irishman would have been butted out of time in short order, but just then Frank interfered.

"Come, come, you ridiculous rascals. Barney has just risked his life for you, Pomp, and now he is doing his best to pick a fight with you. Now do yon take your place at the helm, Barney. As for you, Pomp, it's nearly supper time. Come, be off to the cook's galley, and see what a good supper you can get us up. We are all hungry and tired after the hard fight we have had," said the inventor.

"I done tole yer what will do all han's a heap ob good just now, Mars Frank," replied Pomp.

"What is it, you rascal?"

"Little drops ob whisky, poured on broken ice,
Little grains ob sugar—ob lemon peel a slice,
Just a dash ob angustora bitters, pray,
Makes what we calls a cock tail in the U. S. A."

sang Pomp.

"Good enough. Doctor, will you authorize Pomp's prescription," laughed Frank.

"I will, indeed. Pomp has diagnosed our case exactly, and Pomp, please put a plenty of the little drops in mine," replied the genial doctor.

"Deed I will, boss."

"Begob, an' no mixed drinks in mine, good ould straight Irish whisky is good enough for me, now do yez moind that, nagur," admonished Barney, and he went off to the helm, smacking his lips in pleasant anticipation.

Presently all hands were sipping refreshing drinks which Pomp had concocted, with the skill of a Hoffman House dispensing clerk.

Barney's beverage was according to his orders, straight Irish whisky—it seemed. But alas—Barney found that things are not always what they seem.

He had barely taken the first sip of his drink when he sprang up from his seat at the wheel in great wrath.

Then bang! crash! went the glass of "grog" against the deck-house, as he hurled it at Pomp's head. Pomp had "fixed" Barney's drink with a handful of cayenne pepper. The Irishman liked his liquor fiery. But that was a little too much so, even for him.

He felt as if a torch-light procession was marching down his throat.

Pomp was on the alert, and he made for the cook's galley and locked himself in.

Barney besieged the door, but a truce was finally made between the garrison of the galley and the besieger, and Pomp cautiously passed Barney a full glass of "the rale ould stuff," as the Irishman declared when he had suspiciously tested it.

Inside the galley Pomp celebrated his rescue and the victory of the explorers, and mixed himself many a drink of "rum and lasses"—the darky's favorite tippie.

Then he got up a good supper and served it to the party on deck on trays provided for that purpose.

Meantime Frank, Captain Calavaras and the doctor were discussing ways and means looking to the accomplishment of the noble mission which was the cause of their voyage to the land of the Aztecs.

Near by Tamos and Mora stood listening.

Finally the former spoke, using the English language, which Captain Calavaras had taught him perfectly.

The Aztec said:

"Mora and I think if he has acted according to his well-known character, no doubt by this time the false king Incati has become a tyrant. Probably many of the Aztecs who consulted their personal interests in making him king have by this time come to regret his accession to the throne. If so, they would be glad to see him deposed. Then, too, were it explained to the disaffected that you have come to reinstate the young king and deliver to him the great gold secret of his people, and so make the natives of the hidden land rich again as they were in the days when the Spaniards came to seize their country, a strong faction might be secretly raised against Incati."

CHAPTER XXIII

TAMOS AND MORA IN THE CITY—AT THE AZTEC PRISON.

THE Aztec friends of Captain Calavaras paused, and the latter replied:

"There is logic and sound reasoning, certainly, in what you have stated, Tamos. But, to carry out your suggestion, some one will have to undertake a most dangerous service.

"True. Wise one. Quite well do Tamos and Mora comprehend that."

"Yes," said Frank Reade. "Some one would have to go secretly among the Aztecs, and by making known why we have come here, stealthily seek to spread the seeds of revolt among the Aztecs against Incati."

"For that duty only Tamos and Mora are fitted. We are Aztecs. We know the language. We have friends among the people. There are those there who are the friends of our master—who learned to love him while he was the king of the nation before the young king was by him placed upon the Aztec throne. We will go in disguise, among our people, and make known to such of them as we can trust why the white king has returned."

"A most excellent plan. I should say we ought to heartily approve of it," said Dr. Vaneyke, with great earnestness.

"Yes, yes," Frank assented.

"You shall go, my brave, devoted fellows," said Captain Calavaras, warmly.

Then the plan, looking to the overthrow of Incati, and the defeat of Haskell, the white villain, and his Mexican allies, was further discussed at some length.

Night came on.

Felix Frolix, as master of electrical illumination, saw that the light was turned on.

The vessel was then headed due north. A straight course was maintained until the mountain range was passed.

And all the while the electric light on board the yacht was kept burning brightly.

This was done that the Aztecs on the watch in their ancient town might readily see and mark the course of the aerial vessel.

When the mountain range was passed the vessel was lowered somewhat.

Then the mighty range towered between the town of the Aztecs and the yacht.

Of course its electric light could no longer be seen by the people of the hidden land.

After the mountains were passed the electric light was turned off.

Then, as it was moonlight, the yacht soon cruised back over the route just traversed.

The meaning of this maneuver is clear. The explorers wished to make the Aztecs think they had gone for good.

If they had such an idea they would not be likely to maintain as vigilant a watch about the city as they otherwise would.

The plan was to cruise back to the town when the moon set.

Then a landing was to be made beyond the walls of the town.

Tamos and Mora were then to alight from the vessel.

Under cover of the darkness they meant to make their way into the town.

They would then seek the friends and relations they could trust—obtain disguises, and set about sowing the seeds of revolt against Incati and Haskell, as we have heard them plan.

And further, Mora and Tamos had assured Captain Calavaras that they meant to, in the meantime, seek an opportunity to rescue the young king, and escape with him from the town.

A regular set of signals to be used by the devoted Aztecs to communicate with the air yacht, were agreed upon.

Flags were to be waved by day.

At night fires were to serve the purpose of signals.

The yacht was to be concealed in the timber, on an adjacent mountain top.

And from an observatory, in a tree there, some one of the explorers' party, was to be constantly on the watch with a telescope.

This was of course, in order that any signal Tamos and Mora might make might be properly seen and acted upon.

Frank Reade had developed the details of the project.

Certainly, under the existing circumstances he could not have planned better.

Frank only wished he could get the young king safely on board the yacht's deck.

In that event, he would, he thought, soon bring the Aztecs, and Incati and Haskell to terms by shelling the town.

But such a course could not be undertaken while so to do was to decree the immediate execution of the young king.

When the moon had set, and the night had become pretty dark the electric yacht sailed back toward the city.

At a point a mile from the north wall a landing was made, in the usual manner, in an open field, at some distance from any Aztec habitation.

Then Tamos and Mora shook hands with their friends, and set off on the secret mission they had so bravely volunteered for.

"In the morning, *ba Jove!* I must make a note of this. The two Aztecs secretly enter the city by night to carry out a daring project originated by Prof. Felix Frolix," muttered the little dude reporter, as the two brave followers of Captain Calavaras' fortunes hastened away through the gloom.

Then the yacht was elevated, and its course was for the wooded mountain, where it was to be hidden.

A landing was made, in due time, on the mountain top.

In safety the yacht landed in a little open space among the great trees that crowned the lofty elevation.

Then a sectional ladder was placed against one of the trees and its top reached.

Frank Reade placed a board across two limbs and nailed it fast, and arranged a convenient rest for a telescope.

Doctor Vaneyke then ascended with a night glass and stood the first watch in the improvised tree-top observatory.

But morning came and no signal had been received. There was no disappointment on the part of the explorers on that account, however, for they did not anticipate hearing from Tamos and Mora that night.

When day dawned the doctor was relieved at his post.

The day passed quietly.

Still no signal had been seen when the night came on again.

Meantime Tamos and Mora were busy in the Aztec town.

They had entered the city unchallenged, creeping through a water-main, under the great wall.

Safely they had reached the house of a relative. They were joyously received. But they were informed because they had gone away with the white king, since his accession to the throne. Incati had declared them to be outlaws.

As such they were liable to be put to death, if captured by the minions of Incati.

From the relative who was well informed in regard to the state of affairs in the Aztec town, and the mind of the populace, Tamos and Mora gathered all the news.

Incati had become a tyrant and by his high-handed deeds of cruelty and usurpation, antagonized some of the people.

The sympathies of many were with the young king; but the usurper had the sympathies of the soldiers, whose pay he had increased, and upon whom he had lavished honors.

As long as the warriors were true to the usurper his power must stand.

Tamos and Mora saw at once that it was among the soldiers of the false king that their work must be mostly done.

That very night, through the assistance of their kinsman, they ob-

tained outfits of king's guardsmen, and having obtained the promise of their relative to secretly circulate among the common people the real truth regarding the purpose for which the white men had come in the ship of the air, they felt they had done all they then could.

Fortune favored them.

In the morning they learned that since the battle of the tunnel several of the king's guardsmen had been missing.

Tamos and Mora resolved to personate two of the missing soldiers. Having made facial alterations, by the application of coloring material and other things known to themselves only, they mingled with the soldiers.

They were accepted as the missing men they claimed to be.

As members of the palace guard Tamos and Mora were on duty at the false king's residence.

They saw Incati and Haskell and the two Mexican comrades of the latter and overheard them talk.

From the conversation of Captain Calavaras' enemies they gathered that the young King was to have been tried on the preceding day on the false charge of treason, but that on account of the appearance of Frank Reade's party the trial had been indefinitely postponed.

Haskell said to Incati, in the hearing of Tamos and Mora:

"We must not slay the young king now. While we hold him he is a hostage for the safety of the town. The white men of the yacht will not dare shell the town. We must invent some plan to use the young king to decoy Frank Reade and Calavaras with their comrades into our power."

The day passed without important event. Though the electric yacht was no longer in sight, the wily Haskell warned the Aztecs that it might reappear at any time, and that he did not believe it had gone for good.

When night came again, Tamos and Mora, much to their satisfaction, were told off with the soldiers for guard duty at the gloomy old prison in the rear of the palace, in which the young king was confined.

Silently the two devoted Aztecs clasped hands and looked into each other's expressive eyes as they marched to the prison with their comrades.

They had formed the daring resolve to make an attempt to rescue the young king before the dawn of a new day.

But they had just reached the prison door when a messenger came after them from Incati, and in the names of the missing men which they had assumed, summoned them to immediately come before the king.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CAPTAIN CALAVARAS' WONDERFUL SCHEME.

THE two Aztecs who were acting as Frank Reade's spies were much alarmed.

It was evident that some matter of importance had caused Incati to send for them.

They conjectured, perhaps they had fallen under suspicion, perhaps they were found out.

But, concealing their fears as best they could, they made haste to go to the palace.

There Incati received them with such consideration that their fears were at once allayed.

They were granted a private audience with the false king.

Unattended and alone, he met them in a small apartment in the rear of the palace, and proceeded to broach a matter of importance.

The two men of the Aztec army whom the friends of Captain Calavaras were personating were famous for their bravery and skill as scouts.

What the false king wanted of Tamos and Mora was nothing less than that they should go on a scout to the mountains and seek to ascertain if the air ship of the white men was near, concealed by the lofty range.

Tamos and Mora, true to the character they had assumed, expressed their willingness to go on the scent.

Then, that they might be allowed to go forth from the town, and return when they would unmolested, or stopped by the guard on the wall and at the gates, Incati gave them a pass. It was merely a slip of parchment, of a kind manufactured by the Aztecs, with the picture writing—the only sort of chirography employed by the last of the ancient people—on it.

When Tamos and Mora left the palace, Tamos said:

"Now, brother, if we can but get the young king out of prison we will be off to-night. The pass Incati has given us is for two. One of us will go with the young king, the other will go as we came."

"So be it brother," replied Mora.

And then they went on to the prison.

That same night.

The hour was twelve.

Frank Reade was on duty in the observatory in the tree on the mountain top.

All at once he saw a red light flash up thrice in the direction of the Aztec town.

"Ah!" cried Frank. "The signal agreed upon between us and Tamos and Mora. It tells me to hasten with the electric yacht to their assistance."

Frank hastened down the ladder from the tree top, and made known to the others what he had seen.

Then the yacht was raised.

In a few moments it was sailing for the city.

As the electric vessel approached it the signal was seen again.

The yacht was steered for it.

Presently the electric light on board the vessel revealed a thrilling scene.

Frank and his comrades saw a man running from the city. He was at some distance beyond its walls when discovered.

And behind him, seeking to run him down, came half a hundred Aztec guards.

Frank did not recognize the fugitive.

He was really Tamos in the disguise he had assumed.

But the keen-eyed Captain Calavaras at once saw something familiar about the man who was running for his life.

In a moment the captain cried out excitedly:

"That man is my faithful Tamos!"

Then the electric yacht was made to sail downward, and firing over the head of the fugitive, the crew discharged a volley of rifle-shots at the Aztecs, when they were within range of them.

Still the enemies of Tamos came on.

It was a thrilling moment.

It seemed that the daring spy of Frank Reade was to be run down.

But Frank trained the bow cannon on the Aztecs and sent an explosive shell hurtling among them with fatal effect. Then the Aztecs halted in confusion.

Tamos came on.

The vessel of the air reached the earth, and the well-nigh exhausted Tamos gained the deck and fell down breathless.

While Dr. Vaneyke made haste to give him a restorative, the yacht was elevated in the usual manner.

Then when a considerable elevation was attained it sailed away.

Tamos was soon able to make his report, and he said, after narrating all that had befallen himself and Mora with which the reader is already acquainted:

"Mora and I were stationed before the door of the young king's cell in the prison.

"When we were alone there we set to work to open the cell.

"While we were thus engaged there came the sound of a great commotion outside.

"The next moment Incati himself followed by Haskell and the Mexican and a score of guards, among whom, to our horror, we beheld the very two men we were personating, rushed in.

"'Traitor!' cried Incati. Then to his guards: 'seize the two impostors, and at sunrise they shall be beheaded in the public square!'

"At that Mora and I drew our great swords and made a charge for our lives. Our movement was unexpected, because it was so desperate—so foolhardy—if you will.

"I got through the ranks of the guards. Oh, it was a fight to remember to my dying day. Mora was struck down. I could not save him, so I ran from the prison and escaped. But as I went I saw that Mora had only been stunned. He gained his feet, only to be seized and bound, and on the morrow he must die."

As Tamos paused, Frank said:

"So your mission has failed, and poor Mora is left to share the fate of the young king?"

"But our work has not entirely failed. The truth of the purpose for which you have come will be secretly spread by our agents among the soldiers and the populace. A revolt may yet ensue against the false king," Tamos hastened to say.

"That is so," said Captain Calavaras.

"And now I am determined to enter the city in person this night. I am familiar with every path of it, the palace, the prison; every building of a public character is known to me. Mora shall not die upon the morrow," he added.

The night had grown very dark.

At the request of Captain Calavaras the electric lights were turned off. In the gloom the yacht sailed south of the city.

There Captain Calavaras requested that he be put upon the earth. Having first attired himself in the garb of an Aztec soldier worn by Tamos—despite the attempts of his friends to dissuade him from the undertaking, Captain Calavaras set out for the city.

But before he departed he said to Frank:

"At precisely the hour of sunrise do you make a descent, in the yard, in the rear of the palace."

Frank pledged his word to do so.

Half an hour later Captain Calavaras stood in the house of Tamos' kinsman in the city. He was received as if he was yet king of the Aztecs.

Alone, by the light of a golden lamp, provided him by his host, Captain Calavaras consulted the will of the old Aztec king which contained the secret of the great hidden treasures of his people.

Then he stole forth into the street.

Not far from the house of Tamos' kinsman stood a great idol of the Aztecs—a huge stone image of the heathen deity—called Chalmoll.

The base of the idol was a massive stone block. Reaching it Captain Calavaras suddenly vanished.

He had passed through a secret door under the idol, the existence of which had been revealed to him by the will of the dead Aztec king.

Under the idol there was a passage which Captain Calavaras traversed rapidly.

At length he paused, and said to himself:

"I am now under the palace."

Presently he reached a stone door. He possessed the secret of how

to open it, and having caused it to swing aside he ascended a flight of stone stairs.

At the head of the flight there was what seemed to be a solid wall.

Captain Calavaras paused.

He experienced a sense of the greatest excitement.

And well might he do so.

He knew—from the contents of the will of the young king's sire that he was now at the wall of the private sleeping chamber of the king in the palace.

He doubted not that it was occupied by Incati.

For a few moments Captain Calavaras stood motionless. Then he drew a dagger, and felt along the wall. His hands came in contact with a metal spike. He pressed upon it, and immediately a door set in the wall—made of a slab of stone—slid noiselessly aside.

The next moment the daring adventurer entered the magnificent sleeping chamber of the Aztec king.

A man lay sound asleep upon a curtained couch.

An oil lamp, of carved gold, shed a faint light over the room. Captain Calavaras crept breathlessly toward the royal couch. He reached it and saw that the sleeper was really Incati.

The life of the foe of the young king—the usurper of the throne of the Aztecs was now at the American's mercy.

Sunrise!

Just as the god of day showed his shining rays upon the eastern horizon, Frank Reade, true to his promise, came sweeping down from the sky into the open yard in the rear of the palace.

At that time the yard was deserted.

The town was not as yet fully awakened for the day.

All at once a gate in the wall opened and Frank cried out:

"There comes Incati himself, and a band of his soldiers with the young king, and Mora marching among them! What means this? What has become of Calavaras?"

CHAPTER XXV.

CAPTURED—IN A PRISON CELL—DESPAIR.

It was a moment of bitter disappointment for the young inventor and his comrades.

They had all counted strongly upon Captain Calavaras to accomplish some stratagem, looking to the rescue of the young king and Mora.

According to the directions of Calavaras, the electric yacht was on hand with her daring crew to co-operate with the adventurer, but he came not.

Frank Reade believed that the two men whose rescue Captain Calavaras had hoped to accomplish were now being led to execution.

He feared the worst for the captain, but there was no time for much reflection. He must act with the utmost promptitude, if anything was to be done in behalf of the young king and Mora.

"Begorra!" cried Barney. "There's not more than two dozen av the yellow nagurs. Faith an' let's have a ruction wid thim, and try to run off wid the two prisoners."

"Golly! I'se wid Irish on dat racket," cried Pomp.

There was a bare chance that, by a sudden charge, the explorers might wrest the doomed men from their captors.

Frank Reade caught at that chance.

A few hurried words were spoken.

The young inventor instructed Felix Frolix to remain in the deck-house and guard the yacht.

If any enemy attempted to board it he was to discharge the battery of electric rifles.

"Ma deah fellah, I'll save the yacht again, if necessary! I will, baw Jove, doncherknow," said Felix importantly.

But a moment had elapsed since the gate in the wall opened, disclosing the approach of the captives and their guards, when Frank and his comrades rushed at them.

It seemed the guards were not aware of the presence of the Americans until the charge was made.

Straight for the gate went Frank and his comrades, and they surged through it as they saw the guards halt.

Fatal movement. Scarcely had the Americans passed the portal when it was closed by three men who stood behind it.

Frank heard the great metal gate clang shut, but he did not see the men who closed it.

They had shut themselves in the yard where the yacht stood.

The young inventor would have experienced alarm, could he have seen the three men who closed the gate.

They were Haskell—the vindictive enemy of Captain Calavaras—and the two Mexican cutthroats who were allies of the villain.

The charge of the Americans was met in a way which the former had not anticipated.

Incatie leaped to the prisoners, and guards formed a hollow square about them, with their long spears leveled. To rush upon them was to court death.

The spearmen knelt on one knee. Behind them stood arches.

A flight of arrows greeted the charge of the men of the air yacht. They discharged their weapons. Then, as if the reports of their weapons had been a signal, around an adjacent corner came full half a hundred warriors.

Frank Reade saw that it would now be folly to continue the charge.

He ordered a retreat.

A rush was made by the Americans for the gate through which they had come.

Reaching it they found it fast. The truth was Haskell and the Mexicans had secured it on the inner side.

Vainly—making frantic, furious efforts—did the men of Frank Reade's heroic little band attempt to force the gate. It would not yield.

The street in front of the gate was now completely closed by the Aztecs.

The Americans were caught into a trap into which their bravery had betrayed them.

The wall of the yard, beyond the palace, was fully twelve feet high. It could not be scaled for its side offered no supports for the explorers to climb by.

Exultant shouts burst from the Aztecs.

Frank Reade and his comrades set their backs against the gate and faced the foe.

Death stared them in the face. But at least if they must perish they meant to meet their doom like heroes.

But suddenly Pomp uttered a sharp cry and exclaimed:

"Look dar, look dar! De air yacht am sailin' off!"

All glanced upward in the direction in which Pomp pointed, as he spoke, and then, oh, horror!

They saw the electric yacht soaring high above the wall.

The discovery was like a thunderbolt of doom for the Americans.

Surprise and despair were the emotions that dominated all their minds then.

But, in an instant, another startling surprise was made.

They saw a white man upon the deck of the yacht who was not Felix Frolix.

Frank recognized the man at once.

"Danvers!" he cried. "Danvers, the traitor whom we put off the yacht, far away in the mountains!"

At once Frank comprehended that Danvers had availed himself of the knowledge of the management of the electric yacht, which he had acquired as one of its crew to elevate it.

How he came there—how he had been able to seize the yacht without being fired upon by Felix Frolix, were, however, points Frank did not understand.

The yacht hung in mid-air for a moment, directly over the great square flat roof of the prison, in the rear of the palace.

Then it descended and came to rest on the prison roof, where it was as completely beyond the reach of Frank Reade and his men, as if he had been thousands of feet above the earth.

"We are lost! Doomed! Doomed to a terrible fate!" uttered the doctor.

And then on came the enemy.

Against the vast force hurled at them, the utmost heroism manifested by the Americans availed nothing.

But the Aztec's did not seek to slay them then.

The voice of Incati rang out, and could they have understood what he said, the Americans would have known that he ordered his soldiers to take the white men alive.

By sheer force of numbers, the heroic band was overpowered and captured though the achievement cost the lives of many of their foes.

All were dragged down and bound.

Then, in triumph, they were conducted into the prison. But first the gate was opened, and Haskell and the two Mexicans came forth.

"Ha! Ha! We win at last! Senor Reade, you and all your party are at our mercy. The great gold secret of the Aztecs is ours too, for Calavaras is also a captive, and we have taken from him the will of the old king, which reveals where the great treasure of his people, which was secreted hundreds of years ago, is hidden," said Haskell tauntingly.

It seemed that the measure of calamity was filled to overflowing for the explorers when they heard this.

"You lie, you infernal scoundrel!" cried Frank, fiercely. "I do not believe you have Captain Calavaras a prisoner."

"Then behold this," said Haskell.

As he spoke he drew an Aztec parchment from his bosom and opened it.

Frank saw at once that it was indeed the will of the old king, which Captain Calavaras had shown him at his mansion in Readestown.

"Now, while you and your men rot in the dungeon of the Aztecs Incati, and I will secure the treasure of the ancient race," continued Haskell.

"Be the powers av turf it's tin years av me life I would give for a chance for a ruction wid yez, ye blackguard av the world!" roared Barney, glaring at Haskell.

The villain laughed, and then he strode up to Barney and dealt the bound captive a cowardly blow in the face.

As he stepped back he passed Pomp.

Though the brave darky's hands were bound behind his back his head was free.

Pomp ducked like a flash.

The next moment his head struck Haskell with the force of a battering-ram below the belt.

The wretch fell.

All the breath was knocked out of his body. He remained like one dead where he had fallen, all doubled up.

"Sot up a nndder no account rascal, I'se de darky champion but-

ter from Buttersville, an' right on de butt now from de word go!" said Pomp.

But he and the others were immediately hustled into the prison, while Barney cried out:

"Begob, on account av that butt, sure an' I'll forgive yez all the jokes iver ye played on the loikes av me, nagur. Faith, an' it's a black diamond yez are."

Inside the prison the captives were all thrust into one great cell. It had only one window, and that was a small one, placed high up near the ceiling and covered with a metal grating.

The door was of metal and very massive.

Hope was crushed out of the hearts of the captives entirely. They heard great bolts and bars fixed on the outside of the cell door to secure it.

It seemed to them they were shut up in a living tomb.

They thought of Haskell's terrible words, which clearly implied they were doomed to imprisonment for life.

Mora was thrust into the great cell with the others of Frank Reade's band.

But the young king was taken elsewhere by his foes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHAT BEFELL CAPTAIN CALAVARAS—SPEAKING OF DANVERS.

WE left Captain Calavaras in the sleeping chamber of Incati—the false king—standing over the slumbering Aztec with his dagger in hand.

Captain Calavaras had a definite purpose in coming there. He meant to force Incati to give him an order for the release of the young king, and then having bound and gagged Incati, he meant to secrete him in the hidden passage, while he went to lead the royal captive forth to freedom.

But at the very moment when the American adventurer began to feel sure of success as he stood over Incati, he was seized from behind by two hideous dwarfs.

They were the secret body guard of Incati.

At night they slept in a corner of the king's room.

The shadows fell darkly in the corner near the couch, where the dwarfs lay when Captain Calavaras entered the sleeping chambers of Incati.

The dwarfs were awake as fate would have it, and the cunning fellows discovered the American as he entered the chamber through the secret door.

The dwarfs waited until Calavaras' back was turned toward them.

Then they leaped upon him. One of the little giants—for such they were in strength, carried a great, metal-studded war-club.

With the terrible bludgeon he dealt Calavaras two heavy blows on the head.

The American fell.

Incati bounded up.

The dwarfs hastily explained the presence of the American, whom Incati recognized at a glance as the former ruler of the Aztecs, and his old enemy.

The captain lay stunned.

But he uttered an occasional groan, that told his enemies he was not dead.

The dwarf who carried the war club raised the weapon to strike Calavaras again.

But Incati quickly caught his arm, and said:

"No, no! We will keep him alive. He shall become a human sacrifice. He shall die on the altar of Chalmoll."

So the dwarf bowed assent to Incati's will, and put aside his war club.

Calavaras' hands were bound, and he was laid upon a couch.

A few moments later one of the outer guards was heard knocking upon the door of the royal chamber.

"What is wanted?" demanded Incati.

"The white men, who are thy friends, oh, great king, seek an audience, and they bade Rocai say that they had important news to make known to the great Incati," replied the guard.

Incati ordered the dwarf to open the chamber door.

When the portal had swung open upon its hinges the king said to the messenger:

"Conduct the three white men here."

Very soon Haskell entered the king's chamber.

But with him came four men. Incati recognized two of Haskell's comrades. They were the Mexicans.

The third man Incati had never before seen, and he was a white man.

At the sight of him the king exclaimed:

"Have you brought me a prisoner?"

"No," replied Haskell. "I have brought you another friend. This man is called Danvers. He was hired by me to sail on the air yacht as one of Frank Reade's crew, and rob Calavaras and wreck the yacht, while we came on to the Aztec land. I gave Danvers a map of the route here, and instructed him to join me when he had accomplished his work. But he was found out and put off Frank Reade's yacht. He has just made his way here, guided by my map. He knows all about the working of the yacht, and if we can capture it he can teach us to use it. Ah, once in our possession the wonderful air-ship may be of great use to us."

Haskell paused. He had not seen Calavaras yet, for he lay in the shadow at the end of the room.

As the villain ceased speaking Calavaras uttered a deep groan.

Haskell started apprehensively and exclaimed:

"What was that?"

"A captive."

"A captive here in your private room?"

"Yes. He came to kill me."

"Who is he?"

"You shall see."

Incati led the way to the couch on which Calavaras lay.

Haskell uttered a cry of surprise and delight as he saw and recognized the face of his old foe—the man he hated with all the venom of an evil nature.

"Calavaras! Now, by all that's wonderful, how came he here?" exclaimed Haskell.

Incati explained.

"Ha! Let us search him. I believe he has the will of the old king, containing the secret of the hidden treasure on his person," he added. Calavaras was searched.

The old king's will was found in a secret pocket.

Then how Incati and Haskell exulted.

And they read the picture writing of the old king.

Haskell remarked, when he and the usurper had mastered the writing:

"We have a long and dangerous journey to make to the place where the treasure is secreted. The route lies through the land of the fierce, wild Indians whom the Aztecs have always feared. How shall we reach the gold cave?"

"We must march to it with a great army."

"But the legions of the wild Indians would outnumber your warriors a hundred to one. They would all be slain long before the treasure was reached."

"Must we then give it up?"

"No, no! We must seek to capture Frank Reade's electric yacht, and in it—instructed in its management by Danvers—sail through the air to the gold cave of Montezuma."

"Good! The white man has a wise head. But to Incati it seems an impossible thing to capture the great ship of the air."

"We must lay a plot—we must resort to stratagem."

"But how—how?"

"I cannot tell yet. I will seek to devise some plan later on; but listen, Calavaras is muttering to himself. Ah, I understand what that means; the terrible blows he received on the head have induced delirium."

"It must be so."

"Listen to what he says."

"Yes, it may be something important."

Incati and the other were silent.

"Oh, that is the plan. At sunrise, Mr. Reade, you will descend in the yacht to the yard in the rear of the palace to co-operate with me in the rescue of Mora and the young king. I will depend upon you," muttered Calavaras.

He was indeed delirious.

The blows he had received had produced a passive concussion of the brain. He thus unwittingly betrayed his plans to his foes.

They heard every word he spoke.

When he became silent Haskell turned to Incati, and his evil eyes glittered exultantly as he said:

"Now we have something definite to work upon in arranging to capture the air yacht. It will descend into the rear yard of the palace at sunrise. Ah, Danvers shall be concealed there ready to board the yacht, and make sure of its capture for us if the Americans leave it. But let us lay all our plans with care."

Then the villains consulted for some time. But the reader has witnessed the outcome of their scheme—the capture of the air yacht and its crew.

When the yacht settled down upon the earth in the yard in the rear of the palace at sunrise, Danvers was concealed in the yard.

After Frank and his men had passed through the gate to the street, where Incati had appeared with the young king and Mora, merely to decoy the Americans out of the yard, Danvers, undetected by Felix Frolix, crept on board the yacht.

The little dude reporter stood at the door of the deck house.

Noiselessly Danvers crept up behind him and struck him down. The blow rendered the reporter unconscious.

Danvers dragged him into the deck-house and bound him hand and foot.

Then the traitor made haste to turn the gas from the generator on to the twin suspensory globes and elevated the yacht, as we have seen.

He sought then only to make sure that Frank Reade and his party could not reach it, even if they broke down the gate, which Haskell and the Mexican had secured, so he made a landing with the yacht on the flat roof of the prison, as recorded.

Certainly it was a combination of untoward and most surprising circumstances that had resulted in the great disaster that had befallen Frank Reade and his party.

It was a cunning plan of Haskell's to make the yacht which Frank Reade had intended to use against him serve him to secure the treasure of the Aztecs with.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SECRET LEAGUE—LOSOLA, THE BELOVED OF THE YOUNG KING.

It was a day of triumph and rejoicing for Incati and his friends.

After Frank Reade and his comrades had been placed in the Aztec prison, the false king caused a great feast to be spread in the plaza, before the palace.

His couriers went about through the streets proclaiming the victory of Incati, and bidding all his good subjects come to the plaza of the palace and partake of the king's bounty.

In a gloomy room of an old structure near the northern wall of the town a dozen Aztecs were assembled at this time.

Without the house a guard was concealed.

A warrior with a drawn sword stood at each door within.

From time to time there were arrivals.

Each man who sought admission uttered the same peculiar formula of words, and made the same strange sign.

Evidently a secret meeting was in progress.

Among the warriors was the kinsman of Tamos and Mora, who was friendly to the young king.

When at length a score of warriors were in the gloomy room the kinsman of Tamos and Mora arose and addressed the company.

He said:

"It has been made known to you wherefore the white man, who was once our king, and his comrades have come in their wonderful ship of the air. But I will again state the motives of the whites.

"They seek to right the wrongs of the young king—to depose the tyrant—Incati—and deliver the people out of the bondage the usurper has placed upon them. More than that, the great Calavaras brings with him the great gold secret of the Aztecs. He means that the wonderful treasure shall be found by the young king, that all our people may share the great treasure and be made rich, even as were our forefathers in the golden days of the great Montezuma.

"We are here assembled to secretly discuss the situation, and lay our plans to further the wise and just plans of Calavaras.

"In secret our agents have well promulgated all that I have stated among the common people and the soldiers.

"There are many among both castes who will array themselves on the side of the white men and the young king when the hour is ripe for a revolution.

"We must have a leader. Under him there must be a regular organization of captains.

"Signals must be agreed upon. The plan of the revolt must be carefully arranged in advance.

"We must all act in unison. No false move must be made. The uprising of the faction true to the young king must come as a complete surprise to the tyrant and those who support him.

"Now on this occasion we will elect our head chief and his sub-leaders, and arrange all the plans as I have stated.

"Then when we are sure of success we will strike the blow to save the young king and overthrow his enemies."

As the kinsman of Captain Calavaras' faithful servitor became seated after the foregoing speech, there was a low murmur of applause from his audience.

That all approved of what he said was clear, and a tall, grand-looking warrior, who possessed a fine, intelligent face, arose and said:

"I would name Astabuma—he who has spoken so wisely and well—for our chief."

There was a general assent.

Then the company proceeded to elect the subordinate leaders of the proposed revolt.

As yet the members of the secret conspiracy did not know of the capture of the white men and the air yacht by the followers of Incati.

Suddenly some one came to the door, gave the signal rap and the signs in great haste, and then strode into the midst of the league for the salvation of the young king, and cried, in excited tones:

"Incati has captured all the white men and their wonderful air-ship!"

"Impossible!" said Astabuma.

"It is true! I have but just come from the palace, and I was an eye-witness to it all."

"Tell us everything!"

"I will do so."

While the conspirators listened, in alarm, chagrin and regret, the last arrival went on to relate the particulars of the capture of the air yacht and its crew.

When the conspirators knew all, one of their number, who evidently did not possess a courageous spirit, arose and said:

"The fates are against us! We must abandon our plot. Let us all, here and now, bind ourselves to eternal secrecy regarding all we have conspired to do, and think no more of organizing the rebellion!"

"Yes, yes," cried several of the weaker spirits of the band, and all seemed on the point of falling in with them.

In agony of mind the brave Astabuma feared that all was lost.

It was human nature to adhere to the victor—and Incati had scored a most signal and complete victory.

But at the very moment when the great conspiracy seemed about to fall through and end in the finally disbanding of the friends of the young king there was an arrival again.

The sound of a commotion was heard at the door.

The next moment a young girl—an Aztec maiden of the most dazzling beauty—rushed excitedly into the chamber of the conspirators.

"Losola! Losola, the beloved of the young king!" cried several of the warriors, as they recognized the beautiful maiden.

She was the orphan daughter of a brave warrior and the betrothed of the young king.

The youth and the maiden, who had long been separated by the cruel edict of Incati, loved each other devotedly.

Losola had been intrusted with the secret of the great conspiracy against Incati.

Hearing of the capture of the white men and the electric yacht, she feared the influence the calamity would exert upon the warriors of the secret league.

So she had hastened to their meeting-place, to in person plead with them still to adhere to the plot they had formed—still to seek to save her beloved.

Losola meant to raise the sinking enthusiasm of her friends and to inspire them with renewed courage.

In her hand she held a naked sword; waving it aloft, she stood for a moment like some beautiful deity of war among the soldiers.

"Sons of the great Montezuma, loose not your heart. Though disaster has come upon our white friends, all is not lost!" she cried.

"The rebellion may yet be brought about, and with a legion of brave warriors at her back, Losola will yet batter down the prison doors and set the true king and his white friends free.

"Think, oh, brave soldiers, if you hesitate now, all is lost. The gold of our forefathers, which has so long been hidden, will be seized by Incati.

"The evil white men, who are his friends, will share our rightful inheritance with the false king, and they will carry the treasure far away.

"Not only will the precious life of Losola's beloved be sacrificed, but the Aztecs will be forever doomed to poverty, if you hesitate now.

And for years to come ye will grovel under the iron heel of the tyrant. For shame, oh, ye men of my race.

"Behold I am a woman, and not stout of limb as ye are! But my heart is strong. Sound the signal of the revolt, and Losola will lead you!

"In the front you will find the beloved of the true king. Warriors, if you are men—if the blood of the braves of Montezumas still flows in your veins, never give up the revolution."

Losola waved her sword above her head. Her beautiful eyes flashed. She stood erect, like a goddess of strife.

Her impassioned appeal moved every listener. They caught the magnetic inspiration of her words and personal enthusiasm.

As one man they brandished their great swords and from every throat went up the cry:

"The revolt! The revolt! Death for Incati and liberty for the young king!"

The devoted, heroic maiden had gained her point. The conspirators were again resolved to carry out the plan of rebellion.

Half an hour later they dispersed.

Meantime what of Captain Calavaras?

The fiendish enmity of Haskell was not satisfied to let the captain die unconscious. Haskell wanted to make his foe suffer. He resolved to restore him to make him a slave in chains—to compel him every day and every hour to undergo a life of drudgery and torment.

Therefore a native doctor, skilled in the use of all the herbs and roots known to the ancient people for their medicinal virtues, was called to attend Calavaras in a room of the palace to which the American was carried.

A guard was placed at the door.

Incati issued orders that no one save the Aztec doctor and Haskell should be admitted to the presence of the American.

At the first glance—though the native doctor said he would soon be all right again—the situation of Captain Calavaras seemed hopeless.

But it chanced that the native doctor was a member of the secret league of the revolution, and therefore his friend.

The native doctor meant to save his patient from his foes, and the plot of the revolt was gaining in strength hour by hour, as great capital was made by the revolutionists out of the statement that Haskell and Incati would seize for themselves the treasure which was the inheritance of all the Aztecs.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CAPTAIN CALAVARAS' MESSAGE.

THE day following the capture and imprisonment of Frank Reade and his comrades, while the traitor Danvers managed it, the air yacht was lowered from the roof of the prison to the yard in the rear of the palace.

Felix Frolix had not been cast into prison.

The little dude on coming to his senses, after he received the blow Danvers had dealt him, begged the traitor to spare him.

Now it chanced that Felix had done Danvers a good many favors while the latter was a member of the crew of the air vessel.

The treacherous rascal was rather favorably inclined toward the little dude reporter, for that reason, and considering that Felix had no direct interest in the undertaking which had brought the inventor to the Aztec land, but that he had merely come along in the capacity of a newspaper reporter, with the consent of Haskell, Danvers allowed the dude his liberty, and made him assist him in teaching Haskell, the two Mexicans and Incati, who manifested a great interest in it, how to manage the air yacht.

Of course the little dude was indebted for his immunity from arrest to his weak and cowardly character, which Danvers, Haskell and the others thought would render him incapable of making them trouble.

Under like conditions a man of ordinary bravery and strength would not for a moment have been allowed at liberty.

Danvers assured Felix that he was constantly watched by cunning spies of the Aztecs, and that in the event of his making any attempt to escape he would be immediately put to death.

Upon hearing that Felix fell upon his knees and swore that he didn't mean to run away.

"Good, kind Mister Danvers, ba Jove, ma deah fellow, I wouldn't leave you on any account. Besides, I could never find my way back to the land of civilization, doncher know," he cried.

And Danvers said:

"All right, Felix, you stick to me and swear to always keep mum about this business, an' if I ever go back to the United States I'll take you along."

"I promise a thousand times," said Felix.

The air yacht proved a great curiosity to the Aztecs. In a few days Haskell, the Mexican, and the false king understood its workings pretty well.

They were all anxious to sail away to the gold caves of Montezuma as soon as possible.

But before undertaking the voyage they resolved to make a short, trial trip, in the yacht and test their ability to handle it properly.

On the third day after the capture of Frank Reade and his comrades Haskell, the two Mexicans, Incati, Danvers, and Felix and four of Incati's guards went on board the yacht as a crew.

Haskell acted as helmsman, Danvers took the post of engineer, with a Mexican for his assistant—the others acted as deck hands—with Incati for captain.

Then the gas was turned on to the reservoirs.

The vessel soared into the air, while the assembled populace of the Aztec town cheered it lustily.

The currents from the powerful dynamos were turned on to the propelling machine, the driving fans revolved and the yacht sailed away.

Only a short trip was made.

Everything went well.

Highly elated the captors of the electric yacht sailed back to the city.

There they made a landing, and then preparations were made for the great voyage to the gold caves of the ancient Aztec king.

The yacht was newly provisioned and everything was put in order for an extended voyage.

A day later Danvers said everything was ready.

Haskell had the will of the dead king, which he had secured from Calavaras, to guide him on the route to the treasure cave.

At sunrise all the men who had composed the crew of the trial voyage went on board the yacht.

Incati had appointed a trusted chief of his guards to represent him during his absence, and he did not know that the real object of the voyage was known to his people.

He had given out that he was merely going on a voyage of exploration.

Incati made a speech standing on the deck of the yacht, and instructed his people to obey the chief whom he was about to leave in authority.

Then the yacht of the air was made to ascend in the usual manner, of course, and it sailed away.

Meantime the prisoners, Frank Reade and his companions, knew what was going on.

Of course Tamos and Mora could understand the conversation of the prison guard.

Listening at the door of the great cell they heard the guards discussing Incati and his white friends' proposed voyage of discovery in the air yacht.

Frank Reade shrewdly suspected the real truth of Incati's object in sailing away in the air yacht, and he gave up the great treasure of the Aztecs as forever lost to the young king and the people to whom it rightfully belonged.

While Incati and his confederates were arranging for the aerial voyage to the gold cave, the men of the secret revolutionary league were busy, night and day, making converts and swelling their adherents about among the common people and the regular soldiers of the realm.

And they seemed to be in great hopes that they would yet succeed in making the revolt and in reinstating the young king.

On the very morning when Incati and his crew sailed away for the gold cave on the electric yacht, there was a meeting of the chief conspirators of the revolutionary party.

And to that meeting came the beautiful maiden, Losola, and the native doctor who attended Captain Calavaras.

The maiden addressed the captain of the revolutionary party, and prophesied the ultimate success of the revolt.

Then she said:

"Now, good Doctor Anitako has something of the greatest importance to tell you—something which will cause you all to rejoice."

When Losola had spoken the native doctor arose and said:

"You all know, my brothers, that I am with you heart and soul, though I have not seemed to take an active part in organizing this revolution. But I have been working, in my own way, and to good purpose.

"I have cured the great white chief, Calavaras, who was once our beloved ruler, and now he is as well as ever.

"More than that—he is free!"

A shout went up from the men of the secret league then.

When the applause had ceased, the native doctor continued:

"Even now Calavaras, the wise one, is on board the ship of the air, unsuspected by his enemies."

At this most startling and surprising statement there came another shout from the warriors of the secret league.

"How can it be? Tell us all, oh, good Anitako," cried the head chief.

"Listen then an' ye shall know. By the advice of Anitako, Calavaras feigned to be still very ill while he was really rapidly recovering. One of the guards, who was selected by Incati to go with him on the air vessel, is, as you know, one of us. Last night he, through my assistance, entered the chamber of Calavaras. This morning Calavaras went out of that chamber disguised as the friendly guard, and took the place of the latter as one of the crew of the air vessel, while the guard lay on the couch in the chamber. The men at the door were deceived, all has gone well. It is the plan of Calavaras to recapture the yacht of the air, and he counts upon the assistance of the little white man who has no heart to help him."

The native doctor paused, and the voices of his audience were raised to commend all that he had done and to testify how much he had increased their hope for the success of the great revolution.

Presently he spoke again, saying:

"My brother, the wise Calavaras, has sent me to tell you that the signal for the revolt of the league shall be the re-appearance of the air vessel over the city and the discharge of the great guns on board it, while two little red wind-bags are set free on its deck to soar into the sky. For this sign and signal we are to wait. If the yacht returns and the signs and signals are not given, then we shall know that the plan of Calavaras has failed and that he is dead, for he has sworn that he will never again be captured by his foes alive."

Soon after the last remarks of the native doctor had been made the conspirators separated, to spread the news among their fellows which the doctor had brought them and place all whom they trusted on the alert, and cause them to be ready to spring to arms if the yacht came back and they saw the signal and heard the report of the great guns.

What must have been the suspense of the devoted friends of the young king after that?

One can imagine how intently they watched the sky in the direction in which the yacht had sailed away. One can think how Losola, inspired by love, counted the moments while she looked for the return of the yacht, and how she longed to see the signal, which was, she believed, to herald the triumph of her lover's friends.

Meantime, after the meeting of the revolutionists broke up, when the native doctor had delivered Calavaras' message, that good man took his way to the prison.

He had promised to carry a message from Captain Calavaras to Frank Reade, and now he meant to make that pledge good. He reached the prison, and after some parley with the guards, gained admission.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DOWNFALL OF A TYRANT—CONCLUSION.

By some mysterious influence, probably through the instrumentality of secret members of the revolutionary party among the guards at the door of the great cell in which Frank Reade and his comrades were confined after he had gained the inside of the prison, the native doctor managed to enter the cell.

When the door had closed behind him and the prisoners stood looking at him in silence, while they wondered if he had come to announce the hour of their doom, he made Frank Reade a signal to approach.

As he was unable to speak the English language, he at the same time drew from his girdle a slip of Aztec parchment and held it out.

Frank hastened forward and received the parchment. It was carefully folded, and when he had opened it Frank saw it contained a message signed "Captain Calavaras," traced in pencil.

A joyful exclamation fell from the lips of Frank Reade when he had hastily read the note. Then he made its contents known to his comrades.

But we need not reproduce the message here, for it set forth the daring plan which Captain Calavaras had undertaken by which to attempt the capture of the electric air yacht.

And the note explained how Calavaras had been made a prisoner, and how the Aztec doctor had befriended him.

Frank and his friends shook hands with Astabuma warmly, and though he understood none of the words of thanks and gratitude which they spoke he comprehended the sentiments of their hearts.

When the Aztec doctor withdrew from the prison cell he left Frank and his comrades in a hopeful frame of mind.

Captain Calavaras' message had come to them like a ray of sunlight in the gloom of despair that had fallen upon the spirits of all.

Barney and Pomp danced about in delight, and the jolly Irishman affirmed that the first chance he got "for a ruction wid the yeller nags he would bate the heads av the blackguards."

But now to follow Captain Calavaras on the electric air yacht and record certain events which transpired on board the wonderful vessel.

The captors of Frank Reade's latest invention entertained no suspicion of the identity of Calavaras, nor was the secret of his disguise penetrated.

At the close of day, having made a long journey over the wild country inhabited by savage tribes, the captors of the air-yacht made a descent with the vessel at the foot of a mountain which was evidently an extinct volcano.

"The mountain stood up in the landscape as the most prominent feature anywhere for many miles around.

Upon sighting it Haskell announced:

"At the foot of yonder strange mountain, according to the revelations of the will of the old Aztec king, we shall find the treasure caves of Montezuma."

So it was the landing was made there.

Then while Haskell ordered the disguised American and all save one of Incati's guards and Felix Frolix to disembark, the villain further consulted the will of the old king.

Presently he led all save the two men who were to remain on the yacht forward, and ere long in the side of the mountain, where all the other rocks were of the ordinary grayish formation peculiar to the country, a square rock of red stone was discovered.

It was about ten feet square, and seemed to have been imbedded by means of natural agencies among the rocks where it was found.

But upon reaching the red rock, Haskell announced:

"The red rock marks the entrance of the treasure caves. The will of the old king so states."

Powder was brought from the yacht, and implements for drilling and blasting. In a short time, by means of these, a portion of the red rock was removed from its position in the mountain wall.

Then the entrance of a cave, which the red rock had sealed up for hundreds of years, was discovered. Lamps were lighted, and the cave was entered. It communicated with other caverns, and in the furthest one the gold of Montezuma was found. It was in bars and in dust, sealed up in jars of the peculiar clay pottery made by the Aztecs when the Spaniards found them. The treasure, which was certainly worth millions of our money, was carried on board the yacht.

When at last the gold cave had been completely rifled the yacht was elevated and the course taken to return to the city of the Aztecs.

Felix Frolix and the disguised Calavaras were ordered by Haskell to prepare supper for the party. Presently the little dude reporter and the seeming Aztec were alone in the cook's galley.

Then Captain Calavaras closed the door, and placing his back against it, said to the reporter:

"Felix, the time has come when I must make myself known to you."

The reporter gave a tremendous start and stared at Calavaras in speechless amazement. The little dude had recognized the captain's voice at once.

"You are Calavaras. Ba jove, ma deah fellah, this is weally a surprise—don't-cher-know!" he found voice to say at length.

Then speaking rapidly, Calavaras told what he meant to do. In conclusion he said:

"The native doctor provided me with a certain drug—known only to the Aztecs—which causes long and complete insensibility. I now propose to place a sufficient quantity of the drug in the food of the enemy to put them all asleep. Then we will bind them hand and foot, and while you take the helm, I will act as engineer, and together we will navigate the yacht back to the Aztec city."

"Good, ma deah fellah, I'm with you. You have merely forestalled a plan I had in my own mind to recapture the yacht. Of course it was only to carry out a great stratagem that I merely pretended to fall in with Haskell and serve him. Sooner or later Felix Frolix would have captured the yacht," said the little dude, with an air of self-importance that made the captain smile.

The supper was soon prepared and served to Haskell and his party. Half an hour later every man on the electric air yacht save only Captain Calavaras and Felix was sound asleep. The two Americans bound them all hand and foot, and dragged them down into the hold of the vessel.

After that the run back to the Aztec city was made in a reasonable time and without mishap of any kind. When the city was in sight it was daylight.

Then Captain Calavaras, having set the levers so he could leave them for a time, came upon deck and let go the signal balloons and discharged the cannons.

The yacht swept on, and presently it hung over the Aztec city. Looking down through a field-glass, the adventurer saw that the signal of revolt had been obeyed. The streets were thronged with armed men.

Everywhere there was fierce and desperate fighting between the adherents of the false Incati and the revolutionists.

But the latter party outnumbered the followers of Incati, and the soldiers of the false king were soon compelled to retreat at every point, and they fell back upon the great palace and the prison. There a terrible battle ensued, as the false king's faction made a desperate stand. But, intoxicated with success, the revolutionists assaulted the palace and the prison. The king's men were finally routed with great slaughter, and the shouts of final victory came up from the revolutionists as the prison doors were battered down.

"Hurrah! The victory is won for justice and right! Now, Felix, my hero—that was to be—we will make a descent," said Captain Calavaras, when he had witnessed the storming of the prison by the revolutionists.

The electric yacht was made to settle slowly down until it came to rest in the plaza before the great palace.

A few moments later, Frank Reade and his companions, and the young Aztec king, whom Incati had made a prisoner, were marched out of the prison in triumph by the revolutionists, and by the side of her royal lover, radiant with joy at his rescue, walked the beautiful Losola.

The reunion between Captain Calavaras and Felix and their friends was a most joyful one, and the little reporter amused all by reiterating the statement again and again that he should have saved the yacht alone if Captain Calavaras had not come to his assistance.

Captain Calavaras and Felix left the yacht and ran to meet their friends when they came out of prison, and for the moment they forgot the captives on board the vessel.

Not so the Aztecs. A fierce band of avengers, who thirsted for the blood of Incati and the white villains, boarded the vessel soon after the two Americans left it. When the latter again boarded the yacht with Frank Reade and all the rest of the yacht's original crew, they found the dead bodies of Incati, Haskell, Danvers and the two Mexicans on the deck. They had been brought up from the hold and slain without mercy by the Aztecs.

Frank had the remains of the false king and the white men who had been his allies buried with the other victims of the revolt.

That night the city was illuminated, and the great victory of the young king's party was celebrated with feasting and general rejoicing. The following day the young king assumed the throne, and one of the first of his acts was to divide the gold from the caves of Montezuma justly among all his people.

Assisted by Frank, Dr. Vaneyke and Captain Calavaras, the young king set about reorganizing his government.

In a short time it seemed to the Americans that the empire of the young king was securely established for his government.

Then they announced that they must return to their own land. But the young king prevailed upon them to remain a few days longer to witness the ceremony of his marriage to Losola.

After the nuptials the Americans sailed away in the yacht. The

young king made them accept many rich gifts, and seemed loth indeed to part with them. Tamos and Mora remained in their native land, at the request of Captain Calavaras, for now that the secret of great the treasure had been brought back to the Aztecs, it was not necessary that the two devoted natives should further follow the fortunes of the American adventurer.

After a voyage which was remarkable for its speed and pleasantness, the electric air yacht reached Readestown in safety and was there stored away. A grand reception was tendered Frank and his comrades, and all the people sought to do them honors. Felix Frolix belonged in Chicago. When he was ready to set out for that town, which has recently been heard of in the East because of the World's Fair project, the reporter said to his comrades:

"Deah boys, before we part, I've a little verse, prompted by me poetic muse, which I wish to read to you." Then out came Felix's omnipresent note-book, and he read:

"So after many perils, on earth and in the air,
Frank Reade and Felix Frolix saved Montezuma's heir.
The name of Felix Frolix shall be known to fame,
And in the future his best girl will share the same."

[THE END.]

"NONAME," the author of this story, is also the author of the following stories published in the WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY: No. 1014, "Frank Reade, Jr., Exploring the River of Mystery." No. 1009, "Denver Dan, the Silver King; or, The Richest Lode in Nevada." No. 1007, "Frank Reade, Jr., and His Monitor of the Air; or, Helping a Friend in Need." No. 994, "Frank Reade, Jr., and His Queen Clipper of the Clouds—Part II." No. 993, "Frank Reade, Jr., and His Queen Clipper of the Clouds."—Part I.

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